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BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

VALMIKI RAMAYANA

BY

N. CHANDRASEKHARA AIYER

Foreword to First Edition by

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

Foreword to Second Edition by

C. P. RAMASWAMI AIYER

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN
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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan—that Institute of Indian Culture in Bombay—needed a Book University, a series of books which, if read, would serve the purpose of providing higher education. Particular emphasis, however, was to be put on such literature as revealed the deeper impulsions of India. As a first step, it was decided to bring out in English 100 books, 50 of which were to be taken in hand almost at once. Each book was to contain from 200 to 250 pages and was to be priced at Rs. 1-12-0.

It is our intention to publish the books we select, not only in English, but also in the following Indian languages: Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

This scheme, involving the publication of 900 volumes, requires ample funds and an all-India organisation. The Bhavan is exerting its utmost to supply them.

The objectives for which the Bhavan stands are the reintegration of the Indian culture in the light of modern knowledge and to suit our present-day needs and the resuscitation of its fundamental values in their pristine vigour.

Let me make our goal more explicit:

We seek the dignity of man, which necessarily implies the creation of social conditions which would allow him freedom to evolve along the lines of his own temperament and capacities; we seek the harmony of individual efforts and social relations, not in any makeshift way, but within the frame-work of the Moral Order; we seek the creative art of life, by the alchemy of which human limitations are progressively transmuted, so that man may become the instrument of God, and is able to see Him in all and all in Him.

The world, we feel, is too much with us. Nothing would uplift or inspire us so much as the beauty and aspiration which such books can teach.

In this series, therefore, the literature of India, ancient

and modern, will be published in a form easily accessible to all. Books in other literatures of the world, if they illustrate the principles we stand for, will also be included.

This common pool of literature, it is hoped, will enable the reader, eastern or western, to understand and appreciate currents of world thought, as also the movements of the mind in India, which, though they flow through different linguistic channels, have a common urge and aspiration.

Fittingly, the Book University's first venture is the *Mahabharata*, summarised by one of the greatest living Indians, C. Rajagopalachari; the second work is on a section of it; the *Gita* by H. V. Divatia, an eminent jurist and student of philosophy. Centuries ago, it was proclaimed of the *Mahabharata*: "What is not in it, is nowhere". After twenty-five centuries, we can use the same words about it. He who knows it not, knows not the heights and depths of the soul; he misses the trials and tragedy and the beauty and grandeur of life.

The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic; it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, containing a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations, and speculative thought on human problems that is hard to rival; but, above all, it has for its core the *Gita*, which is, as the world is beginning to find out, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sagas in which the climax is reached in the wondrous Apocalypse in the Eleventh Canto.

Through such books alone the harmonies underlying true culture, I am convinced, will one day reconcile the disorders of modern life.

I thank all those who have helped to make this new branch of the Bhavan's activity successful.

1, Queen Victoria Road,
New Delhi,
3rd Oct. 1951

K. M. MUNSHI

FOREWORD TO FIRST EDITION.

Shri N. Chandrasekhara Aiyer has done me the honour of inviting me to write a foreword to this English version of the Valmiki *Ramayana*. I am afraid I am no scholar and my knowledge of Sanskrit is exceedingly meagre. But it does not require a knowledge of Sanskrit, desirable as that is, to admire this great epic of our race, which has moulded the thoughts and emotions of uncounted generations of people in India during past ages. From the peasant in the field and the worker in the factory to the highbrow and the scholar, the story of Rama and Sita has been a living one.

Among our great festivals, which spread joy and comradeship amongst all our people, there is none which is so popular, more especially in Northern India, than the celebration of the story of Rama and Sita. Valmiki wrote his immortal epic and, in later days, Tulsidas, writing in homely language, made this story a part of the texture of the lives of our people. A story and a book which has had this powerful influence on millions of people, during some millennia of our changing history, must have peculiar virtue in it.

Ever since my boyhood, I have been fascinated by this India of ours. It has been a mystery often, revelation sometimes, and the more I have sought to understand her the more I have been impresed by her powerful personality which has endured through the ages. In a sense, my life has been a quest, an attempt to understand this great motherland of ours with its infinite variety and its basic unity. No one who sees a part of India only and not the rest can have a full picture of her. No one who sees the present only and has no realisation of the panorama of her past, can understand her, for our roots go deep down into the past of the history of man. Innumerable weeds have grown up from time to time. But they have never succeeded in uprooting those deep roots which have

fashioned our destiny for good or ill. Out of that distant past, which is history, and the present, which is the burden of today, the future of India is gradually taking shape.

We must have an intellectual understanding of these mighty processes of history. We must have even more, an emotional awareness of our past and present, in order to try to give a right direction to the future. I do not think any person can understand India or her people fully without possessing a knowledge of the two magnificent epics that are India's pride and treasure.

I am glad that Shri Chandrasekhara Aiyer has prepared an English version of this immortal story.

New Delhi,
November 22, 1953

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

FOREWORD TO SECOND EDITION

It affords me real delight to write a foreword to the second edition of my friend Chandrasekhara Aiyer's synopsis of the main story and the episodes of Valmiki's *Ramayana*—our *Adikavya*. In the foreword to the first edition, Shri Jawaharlal Nehru has emphasised that no person can understand India or her people fully, without possessing a knowledge of her two outstanding epics. The author has taken care to include everything that is of substance or moment in Valmiki's inspired poem and the necessity of compression has not affected either the perspective or the correlated significance of its several parts. In his introduction to the first edition, Chandrasekhara Aiyer has bestowed some pains upon a discussion on how far Rama can be regarded as a veritable *Avatar,* or in the alternative how far the epic may be regarded as a narrative of partly divine but nevertheless essentially human personages with their inevitable errors and backslidings. Such analyses do not appear to me to be fundamental to the understanding or appreciation of the *Ramayana.* I would rather regard these epics and the great Puranas that have succeeded them in the catena of Indian literature symbols and expositions of the basic characteristics, tendencies, failings, temptations, successes and achievements of the Indian mind and spirit. Our *Itihasas* and Puranas in their several ways not only mould and chasten our emotions and intensify our perceptions of the true and the just, as contrasted with the base and primitive, urges of the evolutionary process, but furnish endless object lessons of the perils to which the Indian temperament is subject as well as the lofty potentialities of the Indian personality and soul. I would, therefore, approach Valmiki's *Ramayana* as a story of several quests—of Rama's search of Rita or ऋत or life's norm and of balanced justice, of the quest of his brothers for self-discipline and renunciation, and of the continued approach to unflagging

fidelity and loyalty manifested by Sita and Hanuman and Vibhishana. The glory of Valmiki, however, lies not solely in the portraying of this approximation to perfection but in the depicting of the great qualities that co-existed with their conspicuous demerits in Vali, Indrajit and Ravana, of the risks to which the greatest of men and women are subject, and the virtues that may ultimately redeem even the so-called wicked. These narratives form part of that tragi-comedy of conduct and that chequered story of human failures and conquests which, in my view, are the main objects of the first of our poet-seers to depict or portray. That Valmiki's inspiration for composing *Ramayana* was derived from an incident arising out of thoughtless cruelty and undeserved suffering and the absorbing compassion aroused by it is symbolic of the mingled warp and woof of human destiny woven into the texture of the cosmic tapestry created for the everlasting delectation of humanity by India's primate bard. The readers of this little volume will obtain an adequate conspectus of the *Ramayana* and its underlying lessons, and to say this is no small praise.

Banaras,
February 13, 1956 C. P. RAMASWAMI AIYER.

INTRODUCTION

THE Ramayana is a story of perennial interest. It has swayed the hearts and minds of millions of Hindus for countless ages; it has inspired them to high thinking, noble effort and right conduct. Even today, there is hardly a village in India where the Ramayana story is not told and expounded in Sanskrit, or in the vernacular language, to hundreds of men, women and children who listen to the discourse with rapt and rapturous attention. Apart from daily or occasional expositions, it is no exaggeration to say that *young children are fed by the womenfolk with the* main incidents of the story together with their mother's milk. Romesh Chandra Dutt has rightly observed that "there is not a Hindu woman, whose earliest and tenderest recollections do not cling round the story of Sita's sufferings and Sita's faithfulness, told in the nursery, taught in the family circle, remembered and cherished through life". Referring to the two great epics of ancient India, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, Jawaharlal Nehru says this in his "Discovery of India": "I do not know any book anywhere which has exercised such a continuous and pervasive influence on the mass mind as these two. Dating back to a remote antiquity, they are still a living force in the life of the Indian people".

There are many works in different languages which deal with the lives of Sri Rama and Sita, in prose as well as in poetry. We have the *Raghuvamsa* of Kalidasa in which Rama's life and achievements figure prominently. Sanskrit dramas written by authors of great eminence like Bhavabhuti and Murari deal with various episodes in Rama's life. It may perhaps be claimed, however, that the *Ramayana* of Valmiki stands foremost amongst them all It is one of the greatest epics of the world. It is known as the आदिकाव्य (*Adi Kavya*) in Sanskrit as it is the first piece of genuine Sanskrit epic poetry. It consists of 24,000 verses in six cantos. The style is simple and mellifluous.

There are no harsh words to grate on the ear. The story moves smoothly like the gently flowing water in an expansive river. The lilt of the poetry is lovely. The work is a supreme example of the definition, वाक्यं रसात्मक काव्यं. All nine *rasas* or sentiments from शृङ्गार to शान्त (*sringara* to *santa*) are finely portrayed in the course of the work. Valmiki is famous for his similes and Kalidasa is largely his follower in this respect. Even those who do not know Sanskrit love to hear the original read, as the sounds fall softly on the ear and thrill the heart. Valmiki's *Ramayana* is a masterpiece of literature and attests to the high scale reached by the Hindu civilization in ancient times.

Apart from its excellence as a work art in poetic composition, it is regarded as a sacred text, as is evident from this *sloka*:

श्रृण्वन्रामायणं भक्त्या यः पादं पदमेव वा।
स याति ब्रह्मणः स्थान ब्रह्मणा पूज्यते सदा ॥

Devout Hindus worship the book. The very name of Rama is the holy of holies. It is the protecting amulet or charm, the तारक मत्र. The sanctity of the name is thus glorified in the drama called "Hanumannataka":

कल्याणानां निधानं कलिमलमथन पावनं पावनानाम्
पाथेयं यन्मुमुक्षोः सपदि परपदप्राप्तये प्रस्थिंतस्य
विश्रामस्थानमेकं कविवरवचसां जीवनं सज्जनानाम्
बीजं धर्मद्रुमस्य प्रभवतुभवतां भूतये रामनाम

The *Ramayana* expounds lofty ethics and sublime philosophy in a masterly manner. It indicates and illustrates right conduct, individual and social; and it postulates in many places what is compendiously known as *Sanatana Dharma* or the Eternal Laws. The work is used and read times without number as a prayer book of devotional poems by aspirants to earthly prosperity and otherworldly happiness. Mainly for two reasons it is called an अनुग्रह ग्रन्थ (*Anugraha-Grantha*). Valmiki, an unlettered

sage, wrote the work as a result of Lord Brahma's grace. He conferred on Valmiki supernatural vision which enabled him to see every detail of Rama's life and gave him the ability to express his ideas in choice verse. The Lord pronounced a benediction and said that the *Ramayana* would be in vogue on earth as long as the mountains and rivers last:

यावत्स्थास्यन्ति गिरयः सरितश्च महीतले ।
तावद्रामायणकथा लोकेषु प्रचरिष्यति ॥

In his turn, Valmiki states in several places that those who read his *Ramayana* will enjoy in abundant measure the blessing of the Lord:

आयुष्यमारोग्यकरं यशस्य सौभ्रातृक बुद्धिकरं शुभंच ।
श्रोतव्यमेतन्नियमेन सद्भिराख्यानमोजस्करमृद्धिकामैः ॥

Of late, there has been a rather acute controversy on the question whether Sri Rama was an *avatar* or incarnation of God, or whether he was an ordinary mortal, born as a prince of Ayodhya, who strove to acquire the divine virtues. The orthodox and conventional school of thought adopts the former theory. The modern mind, as typified by the late Rt. Hon. V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, would adopt the latter view. In my humble opinion, however, the dispute is a futile one. It is surely more important to discover what Valmiki had in mind when he wrote the work and how he intended his readers to study and interpret it. From this standpoint, there is hardly any doubt that his intention was to delineate Rama as an *avatar*. At the very *commencement of the work, we find reference to the request* made to Sri Maha Vishnu by the assembled gods, asking Him to make up his mind to be born on this earth as Dasaratha's son or sons for the destruction of the wicked Ravana. It is not easy to dismiss this chapter as a later interpolation as it forms an integral part of the story relating to the *Ashwamedha* sacrifice undertaken by the King. *In the famous encounter between Rama and Parasurama.*

the vanquished Brahmin sage proclaims Rama to be Narayana, the slayer of Madhu:

अक्षयं मधुहन्तारं जानामि त्वां सुरोत्तमम् ।

The Yuddha Kanda makes this very clear. In chapter 35, Malyavan the maternal grandfather of Ravana tells him that he thinks Rama was Vishnu:

विष्णु मन्यामहे रामं मानुषं देहमास्थितम् ।

Ravana himself says in Chapter 72:

तं मन्ये राघवं वीरं नारायणमनामयम् ।

After exhibiting marvellous skill in archery against hordes of Rakshasas, in chapter 94 of the Yuddha Kanda, Rama exclaims to the admiring Vanara spectators around him that such prowess is to be seen only in himself or in Shiva:

एतदस्त्रबलं दिव्यं मम वा त्र्यंबकस्य वा ।

Again, in Mandodari's lamentation over her lord's death (Chapter 114 v. 12-13), she refers to Rama in these terms:

तमसः परमो धाता शङ्खचक्रगदाधरः ।
श्रीवत्सवक्षा नित्यश्रीरजय्यः शाश्वतो ध्रुवः ॥
मानुषं रूपमास्थाय विष्णुः सत्यपराक्रमः ।

After Ravana is killed and the battle won, all the Devas, headed by Brahma, come on to the scene to pronounce their benediction on the conqueror. They expressly say that he is Narayana, who descended into this world to rid it of the atrocious Ravana It is true that Rama says in reply that he regards himself as a man born as the son of Dasaratha. But this very answer would be inappropriate if a mere man uttered it. Throughout the Aranya Kanda during his visits to several sages, especially Atri and Agastya, the author makes it fairly clear that Rama was regarded as an incarnation and was thus worshipped by the sages.

The incarnation hypothesis derives support from the famous *slokas* in chapter 4 of the *Bhagavad Gita* when we remember the history of Rama's birth:

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत।
अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मान सृजाम्यहम् ॥
परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम्
धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय संभवामि युगेयुगे ॥

It is further reinforced by the verse which is usually recited every day as *preliminary to the devotional study* of the *Ramayana*, wherein it is stated that when God, who can be known and realised only by the study of the Vedas, was born as the son of Dasaratha, the Vedas themselves took shape as *Ramayana* of Valmiki:

वेदवेद्ये परे पुंसि जाते दशरथात्मजे।
वेदः प्राचेतसादासीत्साक्षाद्रामायणात्मना ॥

In *his* "Gitagovinda", *Jayadeva takes* Rama *to* be an *avatara* of Vishnu in this well-known sloka which mentions the ten incarnations:

वेदानुद्धरते जगन्निवहते भूगोलमुद्बिभ्रते।
दैत्यं दारयते बलिं छलयते क्षत्रक्षयं कुर्वते ॥
पौलस्त्यं जयते हलं कलयते कारुण्यमातन्वते।
म्लेच्छान् मूर्च्छयते दशाकृतिकृते कृष्णाय तुभ्यं नमः ॥

While it can therefore be maintained with every justification that Valmiki wanted us to take this view of Rama, it is at the same time possible to interpret the *Ramayana* from the angle of approach adopted by modern critics There is *nothing* wrong in it. It does not in any way mitigate the reverence due to, or abate our worship of, Sri Rama, if we regard him as an ordinary man elevated to the pedestal of divinity. On the *contrary, pursuit along* this line of thought enables us to get over and explain some of the alleged defects in the hero's life and conduct.

A superman is still a man, though infinitely better than the rest of his kind and he must obviously be subject to some human failings. Under the stress of unbearable misfortune, it is not surprising if Rama wondered at the weakness of his father in yielding to the angry entreaties of the charming Kaikeyi. To become unhinged in mind at the loss of a dear and beloved wife is but natural. To kill Vali from a hidden shelter was justified by force of circumstances as was his alliance with Sugriva. Rama's suspicion that Bharata may like to have the kingdom for himself and not exactly welcome his return to Ayodhya was a thought which would have occurred to most persons placed in a similar situation One who knew that he was Lord Narayana himself and that Sita was none other than Lakshmi would not have put her to so many ordeals.

Such defects and failings in Rama's life are not, however, really inconsistent with the *avatar* theory. Once God comes down to earth as a man, he must play the role which he has assumed. He covers himself with his own *maya* and is then subject to delusion as much as ordinary human beings are. It is only at the end of the mission that he withdraws himself from his projected activities and becomes God-head once again. Sometimes, he has to be reminded of the termination of his work, as Rama was, after he had killed Ravana.

The other epic, *Mahabharata*, is known as the fifth Veda and contains the *Bhagavad Gita* as well as the famous teachings of Bhishma to the Pandava brothers in the Santi and Anusasanika parvas. Notwithstanding the fact, however, that eminent scholars consider it a veritable treasure-house of wisdom, it does not enjoy the same prestige and popularity as the *Ramayana*. Why is this? What is the secret of the magic spell that the *Ramayana* has over us all? Is it due to the intrinsic worth of the story, the excellence of the poetry, or the wonderful delineation of characters, the faith and devotion of the readers, the enormous spiritual value attached to Rama's name? Or

is it in its value as an aid in the matter of plain living, high thinking and spiritual progress? Probably, it is a combination of all these factors, though each by itself is *sufficiently potent to explain its hold on our minds.* To read the *Ramayana* from the beginning to the end is to succumb to its sweet and pervasive influence.

It is difficult to single out any portion or portions as better than the rest. But if one should be tempted to make a selection, reference might in particular be made to the accounts of the meeting of Rama and Parasurama, the anguish and sorrow of Dasaratha when the two boons are extracted from him by Kaikeyi Lakshmana's indignation over his father's conduct, the conversation between Sita and Anasuya, the description of the brothers by Hanuman. Tara's lament over Vali's death, Sita's admonition of Ravana, her lonely suffering in the Asoka garden with the Rakshasi guard round her, and Hanuman's message to Ravana. In the Yuddha Kanda, the fights between Lakshmana and Indrajit on the one hand and Rama and Ravana *on the other are powerfully vivid and realistic and almost* make us feel spectators of a battle before our eyes.

Valmiki excels in description of forests and the hermitages of sages. Nature, in all its aspects and varieties—trees, mountains, rivers, clouds, dawn, sunset had a great fascination for him. His sketches of some of the sages have a deft touch and they dwell on the greatness of penance and the sublimity of a spiritual life of self-realisation.

No part of the *Ramayana* can be said to be dull or prosaic; every bit of it is interesting as a story and excellent as poetry. There is a consensus of opinion, however, that the Sundara Kanda covering the exploits, valour and courage of Hanuman constitutes the best portion. While this may be true, I would venture to give higher praise to the Ayodhya Kanda which delineates and describes human passions *and feelings and mental conflicts and emotions in* a masterly way. It contains vivid pictures of the nobility

of Sri Rama, the weakness of Dasaratha, the craftiness of Kaikeyi, the fulmination of Lakshmana against destiny, the devotion of Sita, the dignity of Kausalya, the wisdom of Sumitra, the friendship of Guha, and the lofty generosity of Bharata. A story told about the late Jagadguru of Sringeri Sri Narasimha Bharati Swami, is that he devoted the whole of one afternoon to reading this canto from beginning to end. He was so entranced by its beauty that he became forgetful of the host of admiring devotees who surrounded him and he sat shedding tears of joy and sorrow as the story unfolded itself step by step and stage by stage. When so great a Yogi as he can be thus moved, one wonders to what extent we ordinary mortals can be affected, with no control over our mind or senses and who are a prey to desires and ambitions, hopes and frustrations. attachments and hatreds!

There are many shortcomings and improbabilities in the story. But in a voluminous epic of this kind, their existence is not strange. By way of illustration let us refer to some of them. Vishvamitra's visit to Dasaratha is, for instance, rather sudden and his total exit from the picture after the marriage of Sita still more abrupt. He is never mentioned afterwards or at any other time in the story. This can only be explained, if at all, by the supposition that the ways of great men are indeed mysterious. Then, there appears to be no particular reason why Parasurama should disturb his penance on the summit of Mahendra Hill only to suffer discomfiture at Rama's hands, unless it was the poet's intention to point the moral that people who needlessly meddle in other men's affairs are bound to come to grief and suffer disgrace. It is also strange that after there had been so much public rejoicing at the announcement of the coronation of Rama as Yuvaraj, the whole city of Ayodhya going mad with joy, queen Kaikeyi, who presumably lived in the same compound as Dasaratha, if not in the same palace, was completely unaware of the event till Manthara gave her the news. Val-

miki suggests that Dasaratha was taking advantage of Bharata's absence when he ordered Rama's coronation as Crown Prince but he does not say so explicitly, perhaps for the reason that he did not want to besmirch the character of the King. Again, the reasons given by Rama for killing Vali from a hidden ambush are unconvincing; it might well be that Vali deserved to be killed but no explanation is offered why he was not met in open combat. It is also not made known why Indra did not want to meet Rama when he was about to take leave of sage Sarabhanga, or why Garuda went away from Rama and Lakshmana post-haste when he came down to release the brothers from the effects of Indrajit's Naga *astra*. We find the inconsistency of Sagara, the ocean-god, volunteering help to Hanuman when he lept over the sea, simply because he went on Rama's mission, but not showing similar consideration when Rama himself wanted to cross the sea with his army. The story of the despatch of huge search parties in all directions of the globe when it was definitely known by both Rama and Sugriva that Sita had been carried away by Ravana towards the South, appears to be inexplicable. Neither Bharata nor Janaka is informed of her abduction and no assistance sought from them They were kept wholly ignorant that such a crucial event had taken place. Finally, it is most strange that Janaka was not invited to attend the coronation ceremony. Perhaps Vasishta was afraid that it might end in a fiasco if there was too much fuss and publicity.

Such instances of omissions and defects and inconsistency could of course be multiplied but they do not detract in the slightest from the superlative merit of the work taken as a whole. Ingenuity might perhaps be offered in explanation of some of them. Such blemishes pale into insignificance, when we consider the work in its entirety.

This book is an abridged translation of Valmiki's *Ramayana*. An attempt has been made to elucidate the substance of the original and to make the language as

simple as possible. Everything contained here is to be found in the original, although many portions in the original have necessarily had to be omitted owing to considerations of space. The work was undertaken two years ago when I was very ill and it has pleased Providence to allow me to complete it. If the book serves to stimulate interest in the *Ramayana* in the minds of the public not knowing Sanskrit, in India and elsewhere, I shall feel amply rewarded. Suggestions for improvement will be welcomed.

To Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, our distinguished Prime Minister, a great scholar and statesman, I owe a deep debt of gratitude for the valuable Foreword he has written. Other scholars to whom I owe thanks are Prof. D. S. Sarma, late Principal of the Vivekananda College, Mylapore, Madras, who revised the typescript; Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar for valuable suggestions with regard to conciseness and brevity of expression, and Shri T. Chandrasekaran, M.A., L.T., Curator, Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Madras, who corrected the printed proofs with quickness and care.

I am also indebted to S. K. Anantanarayanan to whom I dictated the whole work and who afterwards typed it with commendable patience.

New Delhi,
September 30, 1953

N. CHANDRASEKHARA AIYER

CHAPTER I

BALA KANDA

Synopsis

Once upon a time, the omniscient sage Narada paid a visit to the sage Valmiki. The latter questioned Narada: "Is there any man in the world now who is endowed with all the virtues, who is wedded to truth, who knows dharma, who is grateful, who is valiant, who is friendly to all beings, who is wise, able, charming, who knows his mind, who has brought it under full control and has conquered anger, who leads a pure life, who is resplendent, whose valour in battle makes even the celestials tremble?" Narada answered: "It is very rare to find a man in whom so many excellent qualities are combined, but I can mention the name of Sri Rama, born in the line of Ikshvaku, who is now the ruler in Ayodhya. He is the son of Dasaratha and Kausalya. He is the resort of the good and the pious among men. His father wanted to anoint him as Yuvaraja, but Kaikeyi, the second wife of Dasaratha, was unable to brook it. She asked her husband to fulfil the two boons that he had granted to her on a previous occasion and insisted that Rama should be sent to the forest and her own son Bharata should be made heir-apparent. Dasaratha was unable to go back on his promise and yielded to his wife's importunity.

"Rama agreed to go without even a murmur of dissent, desiring only that his father's word should be kept. Lakshmana, who was another son of Dasaratha by his third wife Sumitra, accompanied Rama; so did Sita, Rama's wife, daughter of King Janaka of Mithila, and the best among women. After reaching the town of Sringibera and crossing the river Ganga with the help of Guha, they reached Chitrakuta and took up their abode in a hermi-

tage. Dasaratha died of grief at the separation from his dearest son.

"Bharata, on returning from his maternal grandfather's house, refused to accept the situation thrust upon him by his wicked and obstinate mother. He repaired without delay to the forest and begged Rama to go back with him and assume sovereignty, but Rama was adamant in his resolve. Bharata, unable to shake Rama's determination, begged him at least to give him his sandals so that he could enthrone them and carry on the government in their name as Rama's deputy. The request was granted and Bharata returned home and began to live as a hermit in a village near Ayodhya, awaiting the return of his brother.

"As for Rama, he proceeded into the forest, killed the rakshasa Viradha and paid his respects to such sages as Sarabhanga, Sutikshna and Agastya. A gathering of sages told Rama of their sufferings at the hands of the rakshasas and he promised them deliverance. Continuing their journey, Rama, Sita and Lakshmana met Surpanakha, sister of Ravana, the most powerful rakshasa king of Lanka. She made impudent overtures to the two brothers, whereupon Lakshmana cut off her nose and ears but spared her life. This was the beginning of hostilities with the rakshasas Goaded and reproached by Surpanakha, the rakshasa garrison stationed in the military outpost called Janasthana, attacked Rama but he quickly repulsed them all. This disaster was unbearable to Ravana; so he sought the help of his minister Maricha in order to carry away Sita by stratagem or force, so that Rama might be subjugated. Maricha tried to dissuade Ravana but in vain.

"Assuming then the form of a lovely deer, Maricha attracted Sita's attention. She wished the animal to be caught and brought to her. Rama set out on this mission and was soon followed by Lakshmana, who was forced by Sita to go in search of his brother. She apprehended that Rama was in danger, because, the deer, on receiving a fatal

thrust, raised a cry like that of Rama. Taking advantage of the absence of both Rama and Lakshmana, Ravana came to the hermitage and carried away Sita by force, after destroying the great bird Jatayu which sought to rescue her.

"The brothers returned. Bowed down with sorrow at not finding Sita, they began their search for her and were able to contact Sugriva with the help of Hanuman. Rama and Sugriva became close friends. Rama promised to kill Vali who had banished Sugriva from his kingdom; and Sugriva on his side pledged to search for Sita and recover her. Accordingly, Rama slew Vali. Sugriva sent contingents of his forces in all directions to discover the whereabouts of Sita. The southern contingent was successful. Hanuman, one of its members, crossed the ocean and discovered Sita pining away for her husband in a garden in Lanka, where she was kept prisoner. This news gladdened the hearts of the brothers; and the vanara hordes, led by Rama and Sugriva, crossed over to Lanka and besieged the rakshasa citadel. A great fight ensued in which many of the leading rakshasas, including Ravana, were killed.

"Rama and Sita returned to their kingdom and Rama was crowned in Ayodhya after fourteen years of exile in the forest. During Rama's reign the kingdom of Ayodhya enjoyed unparalleled happiness and prosperity. There was neither crime, nor disease, nor famine nor untimely deaths of the young. Thus did Rama rule in Ayodhya. Even to read the story of Rama's life is a privilege and a blessing."

The Genesis of the Story

After Narada's departure, Valmiki went to the river Tamasa for a bath and there he saw two Krauncha birds sporting with each other. One of them was suddenly killed by a hunter. The other bird set up a sorrowful cry at the fate that had befallen her male companion. The sight roused the compassion of the sage and he exclaimed: "Oh,

thou hunter! By killing one of the two Krauncha birds in this manner you have by no means covered yourself with glory". This exclamation burst from him in the form of a verse and Valmiki himself wondered at what had been uttered by him out of his sorrow. When the sage returned to the hermitage, Lord Brahma came there and was received with due ceremony. Valmiki could not, however, free his mind from the evil deed of the hunter and he dwelt in his mind on his own utterance which seemed to him to be a model verse. Lord Brahma told him that it was by His grace that he had composed the verse and that He intended that he should now compose, for the benefit of the world, the story of the Ramayana as he had heard it from Narada and that all the events of the story in full detail would come readily to his mind. Thereupon Brahma disappeared with this parting benediction: "Your Ramayana will be remembered on this earth as long as its rivers run and its mountains stand". And every one began to wonder that a mere exclamation of sorrow should become transformed into a perfect verse.

Pure in body and mind, Valmiki sat in contemplation facing the east and was able to see, by the grace of Brahma, the entire life of Rama from beginning to end in every detail, from his birth to his coronation. The sage composed the Ramayana in six parts consisting of 500 chapters and 24,000 verses (excluding the Uttara Kanda). He wondered who was going to propagate this poem among men. In the ashrama, being brought up as hermit boys, were the two princes, Kusa and Lava who were really the sons of Rama. As Valmiki sat reflecting, Kusa and Lava came to him and undertook to learn his Ramayana by heart and to sing it in the streets and markets and other public places. The boys were charming in appearance and had melodious voices Valmiki was delighted at their offer and when they had mastered the great work, he made them give a recital to an assembly of rishis and sadhus. The enlightened audience listened with rapt attention and at

the end of it, the youths received unstinted praise. The melody of the music and the lilt of the verses astonished the audience, and it seemed as if even those ancient happenings were being enacted anew before them. Appreciative gifts poured in. Wooden vessels, bark garments, deer-skins, belts of *kusa* grass, sacred threads, and rosaries were showered on them.

Having thus received the heart-felt blessings of the assembled sages, Kusa and Lava began to recite the Ramayana here and there to admiring crowds. It so happened that on one occasion, Rama saw them on the road with a huge crowd around them listening to their songs and he was very much attracted by the appearance of the boys who were in fact his own sons, though he did not know it then. He invited them to give a recital in his palace, which they did before a large and distinguished gathering. Rama was entranced. The music and the story made a wonderful appeal to him; gradually and imperceptibly, he moved down from his exalted throne into the general audience so that he could derive even greater enjoyment.

Ayodhya and its Monarch

Ayodhya was the capital of the kingdom of Kosala and its king was Dasaratha. It was a big city with broad roads well-watered and fragrant with the flowers of the avenue trees. It always wore a festive appearance with flying flags and festoons. There were pleasure gardens in plenty. It was a well-garrisoned town with an impregnable fortress encircled by a huge moat. It was densely populated. Trade and commerce flourished. It was the chief meeting place of musicians, artistes, and scholars. Sages and brahmins, learned in the Vedas, pious and truthful, lived there.

King Dasaratha ruled well and justly and earned the name of Rajarishi. The welfare of the kingdom and its people was his sole concern. He was a very popular

monarch. His subjects were righteous and none of them suffered from want. They had among them many godly and learned men. Neatness and cleanliness prevailed everywhere. The four castes were friendly and well-disposed towards one another. The king had a council of advisers among whom Sumantra was one. Vasistha and Vamadeva were his religious preceptors. His cabinet of ministers consisted of learned men who were attached to one another and who knew the art of government and politics. They were truthful and far-famed and realised their great responsibilities They would not exempt even their own sons from necessary punishment and they exhibited no harshness towards those who were opposed to them. Sober, wise and disinterested were they in their counsel. And on account of their good government, money flowed into the treasury without exaction.

The Religious Sacrifice

King Dasaratha lacked but one thing. He had no children to perpetuate his line. He thought of performing a religious ceremony for the fulfilment of his desire. Sending for his preceptors and other holy brahmins, he told them of his intention and they approved of his proposal. He then gave orders to his ministers to make preparations for the ceremony and directed them to see that everything was done according to his wishes without any omission. Sumantra, who was the confidant of the king from among the ministers and who was also his charioteer, told his master that long ago he had heard it foretold that Dasaratha would have sons born to him with the help of sage Rishyasringa, son of Vibhandaka.

Rishyasringa lived at first with his father in his forest abode and knew nothing of the outside world. Once during the reign of Romapada, there was a terrible drought in the country of Anga. The seers and sooth-sayers told Romapada that if he could by some means bring Rishyasringa to his kingdom, there would be rain and relief from the

general distress. Accordingly, by the employment of a stratagem, the innocent and simple-minded Rishyasringa was enticed from his father's hermitage and taken to Romapada's capital. At once, the rains descended as expected; and as a reward, Romapada's daughter Shanta was given in marriage to Rishyasringa. Sumantra told King Dasaratha that, according to the ancient prophecy, he should beseech his friend Romapada to send Rishyasringa to officiate at the sacrifice, and when that was done, his desire for issue would be fulfilled.

Dasaratha now acted as was foretold, paid a visit to Romapada, and begged of him to send his daughter Shanta and his son-in-law Rishyasringa to Ayodhya for the sacrifice. Romapada gladly consented.

Elaborate preparations were made for the sacrifice. The king and his three wives observed the prescribed fasts and vigils. There was a huge concourse of guests and visitors who were received and welcomed in a manner befitting their status and position. No neglect or indifference was shown to anybody and there was sumptuous feasting on a vast scale. When all the preparatory ceremonies were over, the sacrifice itself was begun by the sage Vasishta and others with Rishyasringa at their head. All the religious ceremonies were gone through with strict adherence to the prescribed rules, and at their termination, the king made very liberal gifts of land and cows to the deserving

Rishyasringa went into deep contemplation for a while, and, recovering from the same, told the king that he would there and then perform a special ceremony for the birth of sons. When the devas had been duly worshipped through the sacrificial fire, they descended from the heavens to attend the sacrifice. Complaints were made to Lord Brahma about the wickedness and cruelty of Ravana, the rakshasa lord of Lanka, who, on the strength of the boons conferred on him by the Creator, as a reward for his great austerities and penances, was guilty of several misdeeds and atrocities. Even the Sun and the Moon were

afraid of him, not to mention others and something had to be done urgently to put an end to his tyranny. On the instant, Lord Vishnu also appeared on the scene radiant in his silken robes and with his weapons Shankha, Chakra and Gada in his hands. All the devas begged him to fulfil Dasaratha's wish and to incarnate Himself as the son or sons of the king and to terminate Ravana's crimes. Lord Vishnu agreed and disappeared, receiving the praises of the gods.

When the sacrifice was concluded, a dark red-robed figure, bedecked with jewels, emerged from the flames holding in his hands a golden vessel containing an ambrosial drink. He announced that he was Brahma's emissary and had been sent there with directions to give the nectar to the king with the message that if his queens drank it, children would be born to them. Dasaratha was delighted at this manifestation of the blessing of the gods and he divided the drink between his three queens, Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi.

To help Sri Rama in the stupendous task before him, many beings were specially created. The chief among them were Jambavan (son of Brahma), Vali (son of Indra), Sugriva (son of the Sun) and other vanara chiefs like Tara, Gandhamadana, Nala, Nila, Mainda, Dvivida, Sushena, Sarabha and last but not least, Hanuman (son of Vayu). They grew up into mighty warriors and Vali brought all of them under his sway and suzerainty.

The Birth of Four Sons

When twelve months had elapsed after the conclusion of the sacrifice, on the ninth day in the month of Chitra, under the star Punarvasu, with five planets in exaltation, and in the Karkataka Lagna, Sri Rama, of enchanting beauty, was born to Kausalya. Bharata was born to Kaikeyi under the star Pushya. Lakshmana and Satrughna were born to Sumitra in the Meena Lagna. The city of Ayodhya wore a gay and festive appearance

on the occasion. The children grew into boyhood, acquiring knowledge, and learning in every art. Rama easily shone as the best among them. He was the beloved of the people. He was conspicuous for his staunch devotion to his father as well as for his skill in archery and in riding horses and elephants. Lakshmana was from infancy most attached to him and was ever with him like his shadow. Rama would not sleep without Lakshmana by his side nor would he eat in his absence. When on a hunting expedition, Lakshmana would follow him with bow and arrows ready in his hands. There was a similar bond between the other two brothers Bharata and Satrughna. Dasaratha's happiness at seeing his sons grow up in this wonderful manner knew no bounds The time soon approached for Dasaratha to think of their marriages and he held consultations with his friends, relations and preceptors on the subject.

Visvamitra's Arrival

One day, the famous sage Visvamitra arrived at the palace gates and asked the guards to announce him to the emperor. The guards hurried into the interior and informed Dasaratha of the arrival of the distinguished visitor. Without losing a moment, Dasaratha hastened to receive the sage and offered him the rites of welcome. After the usual enquiries about mutual welfare, Dasaratha expressed his extreme delight at the arrival of the sage and said that by his visit he became thrice blessed. Wanting to know what particular business brought him thither, Dasaratha promised in advance that there was nothing which he would not do for him; the sage's words were unto him like a command. Highly pleased with the king's words and praising him for his generous welcome and hospitality, Visvamitra mentioned his mission. He said that he was engaged in performing a religious ceremony but two powerful rakshasas named Maricha and Subahu were always obstructing him. He was unable to curse them as

that would mean a hindrance to his penance. So he came to request king Dasaratha to send Rama with him in order to overcome the rakshasas who would be unable even to stand before the prince. He begged the king not to allow his affection for his son to interfere with his duty to help him in the predicament in which he found himself. Rama's help and watchfulness were wanted for only ten nights.

On hearing the request of Visvamitra, Dasaratha was struck dumb with grief and he trembled with fear. He begged Visvamitra to desist from asking for his son, who was barely sixteen years of age. The boy was hardly of an age when he could be expected to fight the powerful rakshasas; he was still immature in body and mind and was by no means greatly skilled in the science of archery. Dasaratha volunteered his own services with a whole army at his back in place of his dear son who was to him a gift of the gods. He wanted to know who the two rakshasas were and what their strength was and was told that they were the emissaries of the dreaded Ravana. This made the king more distressed than ever and he implored the sage to give up the idea of taking Rama away with him. This refusal by the king aroused the wrath of Visvamitra who prepared to leave the place abruptly pronouncing an ironical benediction on Dasaratha that he might be happy and prosperous even though he was a promise-breaker. Sage Vasishta now intervened. He assured Dasaratha that no harm would come to Rama if he accompanied Visvamitra, but that on the other hand, fame and name would accrue to him. Visvamitra was an adept in the science of archery, and was himself capable of overcoming the rakshasas. If he wanted Rama's help, it was really for the welfare of the boy.

To the Forest with Visvamitra

Thus advised by Vasishta, the king gave his reluctant consent. Auspicious ceremonies to ward off evil were per-

formed and Rama was entrusted to Visvamitra's charge. Lakshmana accompanied his brother. The two lads, taking their bows and arrows, swords and shields, departed with Visvamitra. After travelling a few miles, the sage taught them two mantras called *Bala* and *Atibala* which would protect them from fatigue and illness and from attacks by the rakshasas; the bloom of their appearance would not fade and nobody would excel them in intelligence, or speech. The boys received the mantras with dutiful obedience and spent the night on the banks of the Sarayu river, lulled to sleep by the gentle words of Visvamitra.

At dawn, Visvamitra woke up the sleeping boys so that they might perform their ablutions at the proper hour. They then resumed their march and reached the hermitage of Kandarpa (Cupid) who had been burnt to ashes by Lord Siva with his third eye for the offence of disturbing his penance. The hermits of the ashrama welcomed the distinguished guests and they halted there for the night.

Thataka's End

Next morning, all the three took leave of the hermits and crossed the river in a boat. Afterwards, they entered into a dense and fearful forest. As they went along, Visvamitra told the princes the history of that forest, how it had come to be occupied by a rakshasi called Thataka, wife of Sunda and mother of Maricha who were living nearby. He said that it was the duty of Rama to kill Thataka, thus ridding the forest of its terrors.

On being questioned by Rama, the sage gave further details of Thataka's parentage, of her marriage with Sunda and the birth of her son Maricha and described how she had become a rakshasi owing to the curse of Agastya. After being afflicted with this curse, she began to lead a life of evil and wickedness. Hence, to rid the forest of this pest and to transform it into its original state of peace and plenty, it was necessary that Thataka should be exter-

minated. Rama was not to waver in his task on account of any misplaced compassion or pity for her sex.

"Out of respect for my father's commands and your own I shall carry out your behest." So saying, Sri Rama strung his bow. The sound attracted Thataka's attention and she rushed with rage to the place where they were. She lifted up her hands high in the sky and, uttering a loud roar, fell on Rama and Lakshmana. Visible and invisible alternately, she rained a shower of stones on the brothers. Rama severed her arms and Lakshmana accounted for her ears and nose. This by no means daunted her, however. She could assume different forms and shapes at will. The demoness attacked the brothers once again with big boulders of stone Sage Visvamitra asked Rama and Lakshmana to finish their work quickly lest the onset of evening should give her an accession of strength. Rama, exhibiting his skill in detecting the presence of the enemy by sound, restricted her movements within a narrow compass and discharged an arrow which struck her fatally in the chest. Her death was the occasion for joy even among the gods, not to speak of the forest denizens. Next morning Visvamitra, who was delighted at the destruction of Thataka, taught Rama the use of innumerable *astras* or missiles with miraculous powers.

The Protection of the Sacrifice

Then they came to the hermitage called Siddhasrama where Lord Narayana had lived in his manifestation as Vamana, the dwarf who begged from the emperor Bali the gift of land which could be measured by three of his steps. On being granted his request, Vamana assumed cosmic form, measured the whole earth with one step, the heavens with another, and put his third step on Bali's head, thus pressing him down to the nether regions where he had to live thereafter as a punishment for his boastful crusade against the devas. It was this ashrama that Visvamitra had made his own for the performance of his

rites and penances, until he was interrupted and disturbed by the rakshasas.

Anxious to serve Visvamitra, the brothers undertook to protect the sacrificial altar for seven sleepless nights and days during which Visvamitra was to perform the ceremonies. Accordingly, they were alert and watchful every moment. As the sacrifice was about to come to an end on the night of the sixth day, a terrific noise as of thunder was heard in the sky. A host of rakshasas led by Maricha and Subahu appeared on the scene and drenched the altar in a shower of blood. Rama struck Maricha with one arrow which carried him miles away from the scene. With another arrow, he killed Subahu. The rest of the rakshasas were also slain. The sacrifice was continued and successfully completed. Rama was praised by Visvamitra and the other sages of Siddhasrama for his valour.

Visvamitra's Stories

Next morning, after finishing their worship, the sages of the ashrama, led by Visvamitra, started on a journey to Mithila where Janaka was performing a great sacrifice. The sages told Rama about the wonderful bow of Janaka which could be neither handled nor bent by anyone and suggested that he might try his hand at it. At dusk, they camped on the bank of the river Sona and the night was spent in listening to Visvamitra's story of the life of Kusanabha, to whom the country belonged. Kusanabha had a son named Gadhi who was the father of Visvamitra. He had a sister called Satyavati who was married to Richika. They listened to tales far into the night.

At day break, the march was resumed and the holy river Ganga was reached After finishing their baths and the worship of Agni, the party relaxed. Rama asked Visvamitra why the river Ganga was held so sacred in the three worlds, *viz.* the heavens, the earth and the nether regions. Thereupon the all-knowing Visvamitra briefly told the origin of the holy river. Ganga was the

daughter of Himalaya and she had a sister called Uma. The devas took Ganga away to their regions so that she might sanctify their world with her spotless purity. The other daughter Uma, was given in marriage to Lord Siva. To Siva and Uma was born Kumara, otherwise known as Kartikeya or Subrahmanya, who later became the commander-in-chief of the deva forces. Visvamitra then told the story of Sagara and how his descendant Bhagiratha brought Ganga from the heavens and made her flow on this earth. The party ultimately reached a vacant ashrama in the outskirts of Janaka's city, Mithila.

Vivification of Ahalya

Rama questioned Visvamitra as to whom the hermitage belonged and Visvamitra told the story of the sage Gautama and his wife Ahalya who had lived in the hermitage previously. Once upon a time, Indra paid a clandestine visit to the place and spent a pleasant hour with Ahalya in the absence of Gautama. As Indra was leaving, Gautama returned from his bath and ablutions and cursed both Indra and Ahalya. Ahalya was to become the dust of the earth and she was to remain unknown and invisible till Rama came to the ashrama and his holy feet touched her. As soon as Rama set his foot in the ashrama, Ahalya rose up in her original form and beauty, purified by her endless penance for her lapse She fell prostrate at Rama's feet and he, in return, made her due obeisance. Gautama arrived on the scene and there was joyful reconciliation between husband and wife.

Meeting with Janaka

Rama, Lakshmana and Visvamitra then proceeded to the place where Janaka was performing a sacrifice. On hearing of Visvamitra's arrival, the king, accompanied by his preceptor Satananda, hurried to welcome him and offered him due honour and homage. After the usual enquiries about mutual welfare, Janaka told Visvamitra

that he felt greatly honoured by the visit of so many holy men. Then, turning to the youths, so charming in appearance that they could have been the twin Asvini gods descended on earth, he wanted to know who they were. Visvamitra said that they were Dasaratha's sons and gave a brief account of their stay in his Siddhasrama, of the destruction of the rakshasas, and of Ahalya's rehabilitation and her union with Gautama. Hearing this, Satananda, the son of Gautama, was overcome with joy and plied Visvamitra with questions about his mother Ahalya, her redemption, and her acceptance by Gautama. Thereupon, Satananda turned to Rama and Lakshmana and congratulated them on their illustrious leader Visvamitra, who, though a Kshatriya king, became a Brahmarishi by dint of his long and austere penances. He then began to narrate all the salient events in Visvamitra's life and how he became transformed from a king into one of the foremost sages.

The Breaking of Siva's Bow

After Satananda had finished his story, Visvamitra asked Janaka to show his famous bow to the two lads. The king was astonished at this request and wondered what such striplings could do with a bow which had baffled the attempts even of renowned heroes. He did not however want to displease Visvamitra and so ordered the bow to be brought in. Rama lifted the covering, examined it carefully and having sought Visvamitra's permission to raise and handle it, held it up without any effort and in the presence of hundreds of people, who were witnessing the performance, bent it down. The bow broke in the middle into two. Janaka was overjoyed at this extraordinary feat of Sri Rama and immediately offered the hand of his daughter Sita to the prince in accordance with the vow that he had taken and proclaimed. Messengers were sent to Ayodhya to inform Dasaratha of the news of the breaking of the bow and the offer of Sita's hand in

marriage. Dasaratha was over-joyed when Janaka's messengers told him of the occurrence in Mithila. He left immediately with a large retinue of ministers, preceptors and soldiers, for the kingdom of Videha. The meeting between Janaka and Dasaratha was exceedingly happy. Dasaratha accepted Janaka's offer to give his beloved daughter Sita in marriage to Rama.

The Marriages

Next morning, Dasaratha and Janaka and the sages on both sides met together. Vasishta formally requested Janaka to give his daughters Sita and Urmila to Rama and Lakshmana and in doing so, he narrated in full the ancestry of Sri Rama. Satananda on the other side gave out the names of Janaka's ancestors. The resourceful Visvamitra who knew that Janaka had a brother called Kusadhvaja with two daughters, sought also their hands in marriage for Bharata and Satrughna and this was also settled in an atmosphere of rejoicing all round. The religious ceremonies preparatory to the marriages were gone through in detail with the help of Vasishta; and the bridegroom's party repaired to Janaka's palace. The requisite *homas* were performed and the four weddings were celebrated with great splendour and rejoicing. Janaka gave away Sita, Urmila, Mandavi and Srutakirti in succession to the four brothers. When giving away Sita, he said to Rama: "She will be a shining example of that true devotion of a wife to her husband and she will be to you like your own shadow". On this auspicious occasion drums were beaten and there was music even in the heavens; celestial flowers were showered on the whole assembly. There was universal joy.

Parasurama's Discomfiture

On the return journey to Ayodhya, laden with numerous presents given by King Janaka to the brides, the marriage party encountered the famous Parasurama

(Rama with the hatchet) who suddenly appeared on the scene. His arrival was heralded by evil omens. A fierce dust storm covered Dasaratha and his men. The sun did not shine and there was all-pervading darkness. Even the animals were agitated. Excepting Vasishta and the other rishis and Dasaratha and his sons, who were left with a dim consciousness of what was happening, all the rest became unconscious. In the distance, the resplendent son of Jamadagni of the Bhrigu line could be seen blazing like fire and invulnerable like Mount Kailas. With a lightning-like hatchet on his shoulders and a mighty bow in his hands, Parasurama looked like Lord Siva just before his famous battle with Tripurasura. Vasishta and the other sages spoke to one another in low tones and wondered why Parasurama was still bent on his crusade against the Kshatriyas though he had practically exterminated the whole race in revenge for his father's murder. They approached Parasurama and offered him in gentle tones the homage usual to a distinguished guest. Parasurama addressed Sri Rama thus: "I have heard of your valour and of the breaking of Siva's bow and I have brought with me here the other bow of Vishnu to test your strength and prowess. If you show yourself equal to the task of lifting this bow and bending it with the string, then you shall have the privilege of a duel with me". The old king Dasaratha did not at all like the turn things were taking and begged of Parasurama to spare his dear son. But Parasurama paid no heed to the old man's words. He narrated briefly the story of how the two bows came into existence and emphasised the superiority of Vishnu's weapon. He challenged Sri Rama to take the bow in his hand and prove his skill and strength. Out of reverence for his father who was present by his side, Rama spoke no words of boast or anger. With effortless ease, he snatched the bow from Parasurama's hands, bent it and fixed the arrow. He then addressed Parasurama thus: "As you are a brahmin and also a relative of Visvamitra,

I do not propose to take away your life with this arrow. Tell me whether you are prepared to give up your power of locomotion or the fund of merit which you have achieved by your austerities. That which I hold in my hand is Vishnu's arrow and it will never go without its prey". The great Parasurama saw that his strength ebbed away when the mighty bow passed into the hands of Rama; his splendour became dim and he became muddled in his mind. In soft and humble words, he beseeched Rama to destroy the worlds of merit which he had acquired by his penances and promised that he would no longer move on the earth but remain on the Mahendra mountain devoting himself to the practice of the austerities befitting a sage. Continuing, he said: "By the very fact that you have handled this bow I know you to be Lord Vishnu himself, the slayer of Madhu. Several of the gods have assembled here around us to see the outcome of this meeting. My defeat at the hands of one who is the Lord of the three worlds, is no matter of shame for me". Rama acceded to Parasurama's request. Accordingly with all the fruits of his penance destroyed, Parasurama returned to his mountain abode after praising Rama.

Return to Ayodhya

Thereupon the surrounding darkness disappeared and Rama sought his father's permission to go forward towards Ayodhya. Dasaratha thought within himself that his son was born afresh after this successful encounter with Parasurama and, on his orders, the whole party sped towards Ayodhya, which got ready with great rejoicing to receive the king and the princes and their brides. Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi welcomed their respective daughters-in-law and gave them costly presents. The gods in the various temples were worshipped and obeisance was made to elders There was happiness all round. The sons and their wives spent a happy time together. The princes were greatly attached to their father. After the lapse of

some days, Dasaratha sent Bharata with his uncle to his maternal grandfather, the Kekaya king; and Satrughna accompanied him. Rama and Lakshmana remained at home. Rama discharged many royal duties under the command of his father. He showed the utmost respect to all his mothers whose behests he obeyed. Similarly he was obedient to the dictates of his preceptors. Sita was dearest to Rama and Rama was ever in her heart. Their mutual love was subdued, deep and abiding. Sita proved a veritable Lakshmi.

CHAPTER II

AYODHYA KANDA

Rama to be Crowned

RAMA was the most beloved of his father. He endeared himself to the king and his subjects by his deportment and wisdom and virtues such as humility, sweetness of temper, courage, devotion and benevolence. He shunned evil company and small or flippant talk. He revered his elders. He was skilled in war and in the methods of government and administration. He was a great prince and evoked the esteem and loyalty of the people. Old Dasaratha wanted to crown him Yuvaraja or heir-apparent. He took counsel with his ministers and summoned an assembly of important and influential representatives of the towns and the rural areas and also his vassal lords and chieftains. At this gathering, he drew attention to his very long reign as king, to his old age and declining strength of mind and body brought on by unremitting service to the people and the country and to his need for rest; and he asked them if they would approve of Rama being nominated Yuvaraja. The assembly proclaimed

with one voice that nothing more fortunate could happen to the kingdom, as Rama was the fittest to rule, and that, in fact, the entire population was yearning for this. The old monarch was pleased with their unanimous decision and immediately gave orders to the sage Vasishta to prepare for the coronation. The sage lost no time in carrying out the king's orders. Sumantra was sent to fetch Rama. As Rama alighted from his chariot, Dasaratha gazed on him with exceeding fondness. Rama came near, prostrated himself and then stood by his side with folded arms. Dasaratha offered him a golden seat and told him of his resolve to make him crown prince on that day when the Pushya star would be in the ascendant. Rama was glad and his friends ran to mother Kausalya to inform her of the coming event.

The Pushya star happened to be ruling on the very next day and so the coronation was fixed to take place there and then. Sumantra was again asked to fetch Rama. When Rama came, the old king told him of some evil omens that he saw and insisted on the celebration taking place without delay, as the minds of men were uncertain. He asked his son to observe that night as a time of fast, penance and prayer. He said: "Such events are fraught with obstacles. Bharata is away in a far-off country and this is the proper time for your coronation Let your friends protect you with vigilance." Rama took leave of his father and went to his mother's palace. Sumitra, Sita and Lakshmana were already there. Kausalya was delighted and thanked all the gods for this good fortune. She embraced her dear son and invoked their full blessings on him. Rama looked at Lakshmana and with a smile told him that he must share the prosperity and the pleasures with him and that it was really for his sake that he desired them.

Rama and Sita spent the night in prayer and devotion to Lord Narayana. The news of the approaching coronation spread like wild fire. The streets and highways of

the city were thronged with crowds and the people were delirious with joy. Flags and festoons were hoisted on palaces and buildings, music was heard everywhere in the streets and groups of dancers exhibited their skill in the thoroughfares.

Manthara's Meddling

But a different drama was being enacted in the king's palace that night. The paeans of joy and rejoicing attracted the jealousy of Manthara, the maid in attendance on queen Kaikeyi, the favourite young wife of the king. She saw in the approaching event discomfiture for her mistress and the frustration of her own desire for power. She set her heart on the ignoble task of preventing the coronation and began to pour words of poison into Kaikeyi's ears. She pointed out to her how Kausalya would become supreme if Rama was crowned Yuvaraj and how Kaikeyi would have to fade into unimportance. At first, Kaikeyi was genuinely glad at the idea of Rama being crowned, and chided Manthara for her needless fears. But the maid was obdurate and delivered a long sermon. She said that in the goodness of her heart Kaikeyi did not realise where her own interests lay, and that by the attitude she was adopting, she was decreeing her own doom. The artful Manthara ultimately succeeded in persuading Kaikeyi to see danger in what was coming. The young queen then asked Manthara how she could secure the coronation of her own son and the banishment of Rama. The wicked maid reminded her of the two boons which the old king had granted her on a previous occasion, the fulfilment of which had been, by consent, postponed. The deluded Kaikeyi agreed and hurried to her own bedchamber, where she lay on the ground in grief and anger, casting off all her ornaments.

Kaikeyi's Boons

The king entered Kaikeyi's room to inform her of the glad news about Rama's coronation. Not finding her

there, he went into the inner apartments and saw her prostrate on the ground, weeping. He touched her gently and asked her why she was in that condition, whether any one had behaved badly to her, or had humiliated her, or whether she was ill. Did anybody displease her? Did she want anything in particular? Whom did she want to reward or punish? "When I am your own, why are you in sorrow like this? Your mere wish is a command to me. I vow that I shall do what you want to be done," said Dasaratha. Thus addressed by the king, Kaikeyi uttered cruel words. She reminded him of the two boons he had granted and asked him to fulfil them then. And he rashly said that he would do her bidding, as there was no one dearer to him than she, except Rama. He swore by Rama that he would grant her what she wanted. The wicked queen then called on all the gods, the sun and the moon, the earth and the sky to bear witness to his promise and desired that her own son, Bharaṭa, should be crowned prince and that Rama should be banished to the Dandaka forest to live there in bark clothes and with matted hair for fourteen years, so that Bharata might rule without any thorn in his side.

The king was shocked. He did not know whether what he heard was a dream or a reality. He shuddered like a deer before a tigress, and fainted away on the spot. Recovering consciousness, he spoke to Kaikeyi in anger, calling her a vicious woman born to ruin his family. He asked her what harm Rama had done to her, and whether it was not true that Rama behaved more affectionately towards her than he did even towards his own mother. "The world may get on without the sun and the crops without water, but my life would ebb away without seeing Rama". So saying, he begged her to relent and he fell at her feet. The determined Kaikeyi would not budge one inch and accused her lord with going back on his promises. Entreaties from him were of no avail; she was adamant. She taunted him as a promise-breaker, and

pointed out that such was not the path of true dharma. She threatened to kill herself if he did not keep his word. The king, hearing these piercing words, was unable to speak for a while; he was tied down by his own promises. He swooned again and again, and whenever he recovered, he either abused Kaikeyi or implored her. But no pleading on his part had any effect on her. He begged her a thousand times to desist from asking him for Rama's banishment and told her that it would make him the object of public ridicule and scorn. But his plaintive appeals fell on deaf ears. He exclaimed: "All along I have nourished in my house death itself in your womanly form. Why are you not struck dumb by the force of the very cruel words you have uttered? At no time has Rama done or intended you any harm. Perish! Be consumed in flames. Break yourself into a thousand pieces. I refuse to do what you ask me to do". After this remonstrance, he once again fell at her feet and pleaded with her. The whole night was passed in this manner, the king alternating between anger and pleading. But no solution was reached, as Kaikeyi was of set purpose. She quoted scriptures on the importance of adhering to truth. And she reminded him that a promise was a promise which kings should not break or violate. If he wanted to follow the path of dharma, he must fulfil it. Dasaratha was unable to free himself from the shackles with which he had bound himself. He summoned up his courage and banished her from his sight, saying that he was going to desert her and her son too. This roused her to fury, and she goaded him in angry words to send for Rama at once and banish him to the forest and to crown Bharata in his place.

Dasaratha's Grief

Meanwhile the day dawned and Vasishta, with his disciples, entered the city to perform the coronation ceremony; and seeing Sumantra, the king's charioteer, he

asked him to go and announce to the king that he was ready with all preparations Sumantra repaired to the king's chamber and addressed him in the customary manner, reminding him that the auspicious hour for the ceremony was fast approaching. The words of Sumantra intensified the king's grief. The clever Kaikeyi offered some excuse to Sumantra for the king's inattention and asked him to fetch Rama without delay Feeling glad at this opportunity to see Rama once again before he was crowned and obtaining the consent of the king himself, Sumantra left for Rama's palace, which was thronged with visitors and spectators. He made his way through a dense crowd, and finding Rama in the company of Sita, conveyed the king's orders, stating that he was then with queen Kaikeyi. Rama thought that Kaikeyi also was there to express her delight at his coronation and that both the parents were anxious to bless him jointly. Taking leave of Sita and accompanied by Lakshmana, he emerged from the palace in a silver chariot. The people assembled, offered their felicitations all along the route and Rama heard high praises of himself. The populace was pleased at the sight of Rama dressed gorgeously for the coming event and they went mad with joy. Many could not withdraw their eyes from Rama even after he passed them. Such was the beauty of Rama.

Rama's Resolve

The prince entered the king's inner chamber and saw him in a disconsolate condition with Kaikeyi by his side. He fell at their feet and invoked their blessings. On seeing his son, Dasaratha exclaimed "Rama" but could say nothing more. He was so deep in grief. Rama wondered why his father did not welcome him in the usual manner and asked Kaikeyi whether the king was angry with him for any transgression of duty on his part or whether any others had caused him mental pain or worry. The crafty Kaikeyi said: "The king is not angry; nor is

he tormented by any sorrow. It is out of fear that he does not speak to you. He does not want to tell you the unpleasant truth. Having given me boons, he wants to withdraw from his promise. Will you do what he wants you to do, be it agreeable or not? I shall tell you everything, even if he does not". Rama replied: "Alas, queen, you should not speak in this manner. I am prepared to jump into the fire if that is the king's order. I shall take poison if it is his wish I shall drown myself in the ocean if that is what he wants. I shall do his behest whatever it may be, and here is my word. Rama never speaks twice." Kaikeyi then announced the boons that she wanted to be fulfilled, namely, that her son Bharata should be crowned and that Rama should be banished to the Dandaka forest for a period of fourteen years in sack-cloth and ashes. And she urged that Rama must make the king a truthful man by his implicit obedience. "I shall readily go to the forest," said Rama to Kaikeyi, but he did not understand why the king did not speak to him. He was prepared to give away his kingdom, wealth and even his own life to Bharata and what doubt could there be if the king himself ordered his banishment? Messengers went at once to fetch Bharata. The unrepentant and unabashed Kaikeyi thereupon asked Rama to lose no time in leaving Ayodhya for the forest, as his father would neither bathe nor eat till he leaves.

At this turn of events, the king swooned and fell on his cot. Though Kaikeyi's words pierced Rama's heart, he told her that he would strictly follow the path of dharma without caring for material prosperity. He was willing to sacrifice his own life if that would please her. All that he wanted was just sufficient time to take leave of his mother Kausalya and his wife Sita. So saying, he prostrated before his weeping father and the unperturbed Kaikeyi and left for his palace without regret or anguish. He bore the blow with great self-control. As he left the

king's chamber, there was loud wailing among the women-folk who began to abuse Dasaratha for his pusillanimity.

Kausalya's Lamentation

On reaching home, Rama saw his mother Kausalya, robed in a white silken cloth, propitiating Agni, the god of fire. When she saw Rama, she embraced him and showered her blessings on him. Rama then gently conveyed the calamitous news to her. On hearing it, Kausalya fell on the ground as a tree cut at its base. Rama tried to console her but she was inconsolable. She was unable to endure separation from her dearest son and the pricks and taunts she was sure to get from the proud Kaikeyi. She felt that rather than undergo such suffering and humiliation, she would prefer to have been barren. Lakshmana protested to Kausalya against the decision of Dasaratha made under the influence of a woman. Dasaratha had shown himself to be old and weak and his command deserved to be flouted. Rama was dear even to his enemies. How could one so good be subjected to such undeserved treatment? A senile man's words need not be heeded. "With your permission," cried Lakshmana, "I shall instantly destroy the king, Ayodhya and even Bharata with the help of my bow which does not rest on my shoulders for nothing. If the king is unable to distinguish between right and wrong, and if he is guilty of improper conduct, he deserves to be punished. I shall be at Rama's side whether he enters the forest or the flames". Queen Kausalya was moved by these words of young Lakshmana and she implored Rama not to go away deserting her in Ayodhya and making her the victim of another's gibes. Was not service to her as important as obedience to his father's words? Did she not deserve the same amount of respect as Dasaratha? Separated from him, happiness and life would count for nothing. Rama, however, had made up his mind and he would not yield. He begged his mother to give him leave to go to the forest as

he had already given his word to Dasaratha. Turning to Lakshmana, he said: "I realise the depth of your affection for me and also know your extraordinary powers. But you have spoken without due regard for the ideals of truth and discipline. Dharma is supreme and truth is its very core. I cannot transgress my father's words. Lakshmana, give up your *kshatriya* ideal of severity and valour and follow righteousness in all humility". He begged his mother again to permit him to go to the forest and invoked her blessings. Kausalya once again swooned away. After she regained consciousness, Rama pointed out to her and to his angry brother the true path of dharma.

Lakshmana's Wrath

He admonished Lakshmana for his anger and discoursed on the power of fate. He said it was impossible for any one to transcend the decrees of destiny. Pleasure and sorrow, fear and anger, profit and gain, births and deaths were all regulated by the divine will and even sages were subject to its exercise. Should a thing happen suddenly without any warning or should something that had been well-begun get unexpectedly frustrated, was that not God's will? "Do not worry if prosperity deserts us and the kingdom is taken from us Probably, the forest life holds a great future for me. Furthermore, you should not think ill of Kaikeyi. She would not have acted thus had she not been prompted by Providence". But Lakshmana's mind was in a frenzy. He could not control his anger at this turn of fortune. Knitting his brows and hissing like an enraged serpent, he surveyed Rama from head to foot and looking askance at him he indulged in a tirade against the assumption that fate was insurmountable. It was the philosophy of the weak and the cowardly. "I hate your dharma if it is to bring about such disastrous results. Is it not *adharma* for the king to feel bound in this manner by the words of a wicked woman? To talk

of dharma in such circumstances is to make ourselves a public laughing-stock. The strong and determined do not submit so timidly to fate. Permit me to display my strength and you will see that man may conquer even the ordinances of fate. Neither the three worlds nor the *gods themselves can prevent your coronation*. Why bother about our feeble and aged father? My arms are not mere appendages; my bow is not merely for ornamentation; my sword is not just a burdensome addition to my belt; and my arrows are not inanimate pieces of wood. *Only give the command and you shall see my valour*". Uttering these passionate words he burst into tears.

Consolation to Kausalya

Rama dried Lakshmana's tears and pacified him as well as Kausalya. Addressing his mother, he said: "The king has been duped by Kaikeyi and I am going to the forest. If you also forsake him, who is there to take care of him? It is sinful for a woman to desert her husband. Everlasting dharma proclaims that you must serve him as *long as he lives* Both you and I must obey the king." Kausalya replied: "Dear Rama, do not leave me to live in the midst of my enemies. Take me with you if you have got to go". But Rama again begged of her to reconcile herself to the situation and said, "You are not without *protection so long as the king is alive*. The loving Bharata who is devoted to the path of virtue and who really worships you will also be here. You must see that the old king is not drowned in an ocean of misery. A woman may be pious and constantly devoted to worship and penance, but *if she does not look after her husband*, she commits sin. Women can reach heaven through devotion to their husbands, even though they may not worship the gods with reverence. Loving service to the husband is their highest dharma according to the Vedas, the *Srutis* and the *Smritis*. *So you must serve the king* and assuage his grief and await my return".

On hearing these words, queen Kausalya slowly reconciled herself to her fate and said: "My darling boy, what can I do? I am unable to shake your resolve. The will of Providence is inexorable. May God bless you! I shall patiently await your return. I can hope to see happiness in this life only when you come back". She then proceeded to perform the necessary rites to invoke the blessings of the gods on Rama on the eve of his departure to the forest and she prayed to all of them to protect him from harm and help him through his journey and enable him to return safely. She blessed him thus: "The prosperity that attended Indra when he fought with and killed Vritrasura, the prosperity that was conferred on Suparna by his mother Vinata when he sought to bring nectar, the prosperity that was conferred on the god of gods by Aditi when nectar was churned out of the ocean, and the prosperity that attended Vishnu when he took his famous three steps, may all of these attend you, my dear boy". She then made an enchanted string of rare herbs and tied it on Rama as a charm or amulet and gave him leave, with sorrow surging up in her heart and tears welling in her eyes.

Sita's Determination

Sita had till then heard nothing about the impending catastrophe. After finishing her worship, she was awaiting with joy her lord's arrival. When she saw him coming in with a down-cast look, she began to tremble at the dejection displayed in his countenance and exclaimed: "Lord, is not this the day of your coronation? Why are you looking depressed? Why is no white umbrella held over your head? Why are there no chamaras? Where are the minstrels? What has happened to your favourite elephant?" Rama interrupted her and slowly broke the evil news of his banishment. "I have to live in the Dandaka forest for fourteen years and I have come here to bid you farewell", he said; and then he asked her to

conduct herself properly towards Bharata and to take care of the old king and Kausalya. He asked her not to think ill of Bharata, as he and Satrughna were the objects of his affection. Sita was astonished at this resolve of Rama to go to the forest without taking her and taxed him with talking to her light-heartedly, saying "Lord, please listen; one's father, mother and sons enjoy the fruits of their own meritorious actions. It is the wife alone who shares the husband's happiness or misery. A command to you to go to the forest is also a command to me. Parents, children and friends really mean nothing to a woman. It is the husband alone who is her refuge and protector. If you are going to the forest, I shall go ahead of you, clearing the way of its thorns and thickets, making your path easy. I have committed no sin that I should be left behind thus. The shadow of the husband is more valuable to a woman than chariots and palaces. I shall dwell in the forest with you as happily as under my father's roof, caring not for the three worlds but serving you as a devoted wife. I will not be a burden to you. I should love to see the forest and to live there. Even life in heaven is nothing for me without you".

Rama then expatiated on the dangers and difficulties of the forest life. Dense thickets, difficult pathways, and fierce wild animals woud have to be faced as well as life under a thatched roof and the wearing of hermit garbs. It was not meet that she should undergo such hardships. She had better stay behind and patiently await his return. Sita would not, however, be deflected from her resolve to accompany Rama. She told him that when she was in her father's house, astrologers had predicted that she would have to live in a forest and since then she had been eagerly looking forward to the experience. Sita said: "My lord is my God. The shastras proclaim that even after death there is no separation for a woman from her husband and that she shall partake in his joys and sorrows. It is not proper therefore that I should be asked to remain here".

When Rama again insisted on her carrying out his wish, Sita, out of her deep love, spoke scornfully of Rama and explained: "What did my father take you to be, Rama, a woman in man's form? Will not the world take you to be timid if the dangers of the forest frighten you to such an extent that you leave your wife behind? Do you want to entrust me to others? No, take me to be the Savitri, who unflinchingly adhered to Satyavan. What could be happier for me than to sleep on the grass of forest fringes, as soft as the best of beds? Even roots, leaves and fruits brought and given to me by you would be as nectar. I shall forget father, mother and relations in your company which will be as heaven to me." Saying this, she wept bitterly. Rama was deeply moved and he gave her his word that he would take her with him. It was to him a matter of great delight that she had resolved to accompany him, not minding the hardships ahead of her. Her resolve befitted her parentage and the traditions of his own family. He asked her to hurry the preparations for the departure.

Permission to Lakshmana

Lakshmana, who heard this conversation between Rama and Sita, told them that he would also go with them. Rama tried to dissuade him but Lakshmana was determined. Rama pointed out that though Lakshmana was as dear to him as his own life and was more a friend than a brother, there would be none to take care of the old king and Kausalya and Sumitra, if he also came away. "For my sake," said Rama, "you had better remain here and serve father and the other elders". Lakshmana answered: "Bharata is here to take care of them, and if he does not, he will meet his fate at my hands. Let me be your servant, Rama. With bows and arrows, shield and sword, I shall march in front of you and be your guard". Rama could not resist this appeal of his dearest brother and he permitted him to get ready, bringing with him as quickly as

possible their weapons. No sooner was this said than it was done by Lakshmana.

Then Rama began to perform the propitiatory ceremonies and bestow gifts on the poor before leaving Ayodhya for his momentous exile. Costly presents of cattle, precious stones, jewels and chariots were given to deserving persons of all classes. Old people, children and the poor received special attention.

Dasaratha's Farewell

Rama, Lakshmana and Sita then went to the king's palace to bid him farewell. The road was barred by surging crowds who could not restrain their feelings on seeing the brothers and Sita walking along. Even the denizens of the sky, who could not ordinarily see Sita, saw her on that dismal morning wending her way along the king's road. The people began to question one another as to how she was going to endure the uncertainties of the weather. Fathers would not even think of banishing their useless sons. How had Dasaratha made up his mnid to send away the virtuous Rama? We shall follow the example of Lakshmana and go with Rama wherever he may go, abandoning our homes and fields. Let the forest of Dandaka become a city, and let the city of Ayodhya become a forest. Rama walked along, hearing all these remarks.

Seeing Sumantra at the palace gate, he asked him to announce him to Dasaratha. Sumantra did so and Dasaratha sent for all the queens so that all of them together might see Rama. Seeing Rama coming at a distance with hands folded in reverence, the old king sprang up from his seat, ran towards him and fell down unconscious even before he reached him. Rama and Lakshmana lifted him up and put him on the cot. When the king regained consciousness, Rama begged him leave to go and asked him to bless him and also Lakshmana and Sita who were going with him. Dasaratha told Rama that he had been deluded by Kaikeyi and that it was open to Rama even then to

disregard him and make Ayodhya his own. But Rama scorned the idea. At last, the king, goaded by Kaikeyi, bade them farewell with an overburdened heart, praising Rama for his unswerving adherence to dharma and his solicitude to fulfil his father's words. Rama asked his father not to grieve; he cared little for the kingdom but was anxious to prove his father to be a truthful king. His father was indeed a god to him and his wish was a divine command. "I shall return after the lapse of fourteen years and see you all again. Father, is it proper that you should allow yourself to be overcome with sorrow, when it is your duty to assuage the grief of the people?" But Dasaratha was enveloped in misery and distress. He embraced his son and fainted and his queens wailed loudly. Even Sumantra wept. The words "alas, alas" resounded everywhere.

Sumantra Taunts Kaikeyi

Wringing his hands and gnashing his teeth, Sumantra then turned angrily towards Kaikeyi and addressed her thus: "There is nothing wicked which you would not do. You have resolved to kill your husband and ruin his family. Your son may become king. He may rule over the realm, but we shall all go where Rama goes. How is it that the earth does not open and swallow you up? Even now, it is not too late for you to go back on what has happened. Let the kingdom be entrusted to Rama and let Dasaratha go to the forest in accordance with the traditions of the Ikshvaku line." But Kaikeyi paid no heed to Sumantra's anger or entreaties. She remained cool, calm, and resolute and she did not exhibit even the slightest remorse or change of heart. Dasaratha ordered Sumantra to send along with Rama many army divisions, a treasury and all regal paraphernalia. But Kaikeyi objected stating that Ayodhya would then become like a vessel emptied of its contents and quoted the precedent of Asamanja's banishment by Sagara. But an old courtier who was pre-

sent pointed out the inappropriateness of the example and said: "Asamanja was wicked and was hence sent out of the kingdom. What has Rama, of spotless purity, done to deserve such treatment?" Kaikeyi had no reply to give. At this point, Rama intervened and told his father that for one who had to lead the life of a hermit in a forest, royal paraphernalia would be inappropriate. All that he wanted were the bark clothes of forest dwellers. Without the slightest shame or remorse, Kaikeyi brought them herself and Rama wore them. So did Lakshmana. When it came to Sita's turn, she was unable to wrap the bark sari around her body and with eyes full of tears she asked Rama how it was to be managed. Rama helped her to wear the ascetic robe. The ladies of the king's household who were watching the scene begged Rama to leave Sita behind. The sage Vasishta's wrath was roused against Kaikeyi. "You are stupid. You are going to extremes. You are the very ruin of this family. Having deceived the king, you will not stop there. Sita is not bound to go to the forest. As the wife is the very self of the husband, she will rule over the kingdom in Rama's place. But, if she has to go, all of us will leave this wretched city. Even Bharata and Satrughna will come with us. You will have only an empty realm. There is no kingdom where Rama is not; and where Rama lives, there resides sovereignty. Give to Sita the best of garments and jewels and let her go with her husband robed in proper dress and bedecked as befits a queen".

The large asemblage of people cried "Shame" at Dasaratha. But the old king gave up all interest in virtue, name and his own life. He only questioned Kaikeyi why she was so ruthless against Sita, the faultless. Rama now consoled his wailing father and requested him to take care of his mother Kausalya who was lost in grief at the impending separation. But Dasaratha's lamentations were endless and he wondered if perhaps in his previous lives he had separated many children from their parents and treated them cruelly; otherwise, why had he to undergo such

suffering in this life? He fainted again and again but at long last, finding the situation to be desperate and beyond repair, he gave orders to Sumantra to bring a chariot for Rama. Splendid clothes and resplendent jewels were brought for Sita and she put them on. Kausalya hugged her young daughter-in-law and asked her to take proper care of Rama. In words wise beyond her age, Sita said: "I shall never deviate from the path of virtuous womanhood. Just as there can be no veena without the strings, no chariot without wheels, there can be no true womanhood without marriage. Father, mother and sons give only in moderate measure; but the husband confers happiness and prosperity in abundant degree. The husband is verily the god of the wife".

Rama's Departure

Before departure, Rama once again asked his mother not to grieve but to take care of his father and assured her that the fourteen years would pass away quickly. He then spoke to the other queens, begged them to forgive him if at any time he had, from ignorance, been discourteous or rude towards them. On hearing these words, the whole palace was drowned in sorrow. Rama, Lakshmana and Sita went round the king with folded hands and prostrated before Kausalya and Sumitra. Sumitra asked her son Lakshmana to take every care of Rama who was the sole protector of them all and she gave him this parting advice. "Think of Rama as Dasaratha and Sita as myself and let the forest be Ayodhya unto you, dear one".

The charioteer reminded Rama that the chariot was ready. Sita got in first and then the brothers. The chariot sped away; and the entire city of Ayodhya fell into a swoon as it went. There was universal sorrow. The people congratulated Lakshmana on his good fortune. They asked Sumantra to slow down but Rama asked him to move quickly. King Dasaratha dropped down unable to endure the parting. Desolation reigned supreme. Sorrow stalked

through the streets. Dasaratha was the target of universal scorn and abuse. While the king was shouting to Sumantra to stop, Rama was issuing orders to the contrary. The ministers pointed out to Dasaratha that if he wished his son to return quickly and safely, he should not accompany him for a long distance. Irrepressible grief overtook the inmates of the palace and the inhabitants of the city. The sun did not shine. The elephants would not take a morsel of food. The cows did not yield milk. Mothers were not happy even at the birth of their first-born sons. Planets occupied evil places. The stars did not twinkle. Inauspicious omens were seen. The city became shrouded in darkness. The whole world seemed disturbed.

Dasaratha and Kausalya

The king's eyes were riveted on the dust raised by the chariot. And when the dust faded away, the king dropped down on the ground. Kausalya took hold of his right hand and Kaikeyi the left and raised him up. Seeing Kaikeyi by his side, the king warded her off saying that he loathed even to look at her and that he had made up his mind to desert her. Long did he lament over the disappearance of his sons and he asked his attendants to lead him to queen Kausalya's apartments. At midnight, he told Kausalya that he could not take his eyes from the figure of Rama and was therefore unable to see her. He needed her soft and gentle touch. Kausalya sobbed and wept saying Kaikeyi was like a serpent that had injected deadly poison into them all and was freely moving about in the house. Her own sins in the past must have been enormous for her to be overtaken by such a fate. The wise Sumitra told Kausalya that it was futile to grieve over what had happened, especially as the great Rama followed the course he took in strict obedience to dharma. He had earned everlasting fame by his self-control and undeviating adherence to truth and there was no need to feel sorry. The Sun, the Moon and the very elements would protect

him in the forest. No evil would befall one who was the recipient of special favours from the sage Visvamitra. Those who wished to do him harm would perish, but not he. He would return to them soon and take charge of the kingdom. The Goddess Lakshmi, in the form of Sita, was with him and what could he not achieve? When Lakshmana with his famous bow, arrows and sword was his personal attendant, what was there which he could not encompass? "Give up sorrow, give up illusion," she said; "You will soon be shedding tears of joy on his return. You should console all of us, but instead you are yielding to despondency". These sweet and encouraging words of Sumitra partially assuaged Kausalya's grief.

Rama's Journey

Meanwhile, crowds of people ran after Rama's chariot and would not turn back even though Rama tried to dissuade them from accompanying him. They insisted on going with him to the forest or on Rama coming back to the capital. Rama advised them to show the same affection to the young and wise Bharata. But the people said: "Be considerate to us and show your love for us by listening to our fervent entreaties". Rama did not know how to put them off. Just then they reached the banks of the river Tamasa. Sumantra halted the chariot, bathed the horses and refreshed them. Rama thought of the sorrowing parents he had left behind at Ayodhya but felt relieved at the thought that Bharata would take proper care of them all. As the night was approaching, the sandhya worship was performed and Lakshmana and Sumantra prepared Rama's bed from the leaves of trees. After Rama and Sita had gone to sleep, Sumantra and Lakshmana engaged themselves in a long conversation about the noble virtues of Rama. The whole night was spent thus. In the early hours of the morning, finding the crowds of people still in the vicinity, resting for the night under the trees, Rama suggested to Lakshmana that they should leave,

before they woke up. And so they did. As soon as the river was crossed, Rama asked Sumantra to drive the chariot in one direction and then turn and go in another so that the people might lose their tracks. When they woke up, the crowds looked for the chariot and its occupants. They cursed themselves for their sleep and negligence. Not knowing which direction the chariot had taken, they reluctantly made up their minds to return to the city which they found to be as bereft of joy as the night sky is without the moon. When the men came back to their homes, the women-folk abused them for having deserted Rama in the forest and asked them to go back. They said that wherever Rama was, there was no fear and no discomfiture. Sons, wealth and prosperity did not matter in the least. They should seek Rama and be with him. What had they to do with the cruel and evil-minded Kaikeyi? The whole day was spent in this manner with distress and despondency in every one's face. The cheerless city seemed like the sky without the stars.

Meeting with Guha

Meanwhile Rama passed through several villages. Everywhere he heard people talking about his banishment, the wickedness of Kaikeyi and the heartlessness of Dasaratha. The party crossed several rivers, and after reaching the borders of the Kosala kingdom, Rama bade a touching farewell to the city of Ayodhya and they moved on till they came to the holy Ganga and saw at some distance a town called Sringibera. Hearing of the arrival of Rama, the chieftain of the territory, Guha by name and a *nishada* by caste, arrived at the spot to offer a warm welcome to the distinguished guests. He was an intimate friend of Rama and they embraced each other. "This territory is as much yours as Ayodhya. What are your orders?" he said. And he brought for them a royal repast and begged Rama to accept it. But Rama said: "You have honoured us and we are pleased. Does all go well with you? Is the country

prosperous? I am sorry we cannot accept the delicious food you have brought. I have to lead an ascetic's life wearing clothes of weeds and deer-skin and eating only fruits and roots. All that I ask of you is fodder and drink for the horses". Guha accepted the situation. The guests performed their evening sandhya and Rama drank a cup of water brought by Lakshmana. As Rama lay down to sleep, Lakshmana washed his feet and retired leaving him and Sita alone. Guha and he stood at a distance, keeping guard and exchanging conversation about their hero.

Rama's Message

When the next morning dawned, a boat was got ready by Guha for them to cross the river Ganga. Rama ordered Sumantra to return to Ayodhya. But Sumantra was unwiling to part from Rama and could not restrain his feelings. Rama, however, reminded him that the old king had no more intimate friend than he and that it was his duty to be at his side in his hour of misfortune. He asked Sumantra to convey his profound respects to the king and all the queens including Kaikeyi. He asked him to fall at Kausalya's feet on their behalf. But Sumantra wanted to stay behind with Rama. He exclaimed: "When I go back to Ayodhya without you, Rama, will not the people say that I am a heartless sinner to have left you behind?" Rama said: "Let me tell you why I am sending you back. If Kaikeyi sees you back in Ayodhya she will feel satisfied that I have really gone to the forest, and as I have said, you have also your duty to the king." Sumantra thereupon reluctantly left for Ayodhya.

Ascetic Robes and Visit to Ashramas

Rama then asked Guha to bring the milk of the neighbouring *nyagrodha* tree so that he and Lakshmana might mat their hair as is appropriate for the ascetic life. After this, the three of them got in the boat. Sita prayed to Ganga to protect them in their adventure during their life

in the forest. The boat moved swiftly and they soon landed on the southern bank of the river. After walking some distance, they halted beneath a tree and performed their evening worship. It was the first night they had to spend outside their own kingdom. Rama began to reflect on the recent events. For once he lost his mental balance and observed to Lakshmana: "Brother, which man, even though he be illiterate, would forsake his good son for the sake of a woman? One who forsakes dharma and becomes a votary of lust will have to undergo suffering like Dasaratha. I wonder if Kaikeyi, flushed with success and prosperity, will treat Kausalya and Sumitra well. Why should Sumitra suffer for my sake? Lakshmana, go back to Ayodhya as soon as the day dawns. Sita and I will live in the forest for the prescribed period and return to Ayodhya thereafter. Meanwhile you had better take care of the mothers and our dear old father. Lakshmana, I can with my arrows conquer not only Ayodhya but the whole world, but to display valour now is not appropriate. I was afraid that *adharma* would overtake me in this and the next world, if I did not do father's bidding". Lakshmana reminded Rama that such surrender to grief was inconsistent with his true nature and that his despondency intensified their misery. "I do not care for my father or my mother, or even heaven without you," observed the determined Lakshmana.

The exiles reached the confluence of the Yamuna and the Ganga and reached the hermitage of the sage Bharadwaja. They fell at the sage's feet and announced themselves. The sage showed them every respect and hospitality. He told Rama that he had heard of his banishment and was expecting to see him. He asked them to stay in the hermitage but Rama would not agree as it was very near Ayodhya and visitors coming to see them were likely to become a nuisance to the sage. He wanted the sage to suggest a more retired place. The sage told them that Chitrakuta would be a suitable place for them. Next morn-

ing he accompanied them some distance showing them the path they should take. They crossed the river Kalindi by means of a raft of wooden planks prepared by Lakshmana.

They slept the night in the open and resumed their journey next morning. Finally, they reached the Chitrakuta hill and met the sage Valmiki in an ashrama that lay nearby. Lakshmana quickly built a hut of thatched leaves for their shelter and the three occupied it after performing the usual ceremonies.

Sumantra's Return and the Death of the King

Meanwhile Sumantra returned to Ayodhya and on seeing him Dasaratha collapsed. Sumitra and Kausalya helped the king to rise and pointed out to him that the dreaded Kaikeyi was not there. Sumantra conveyed Rama's message to the king and said that Lakshmana was most furious and had exclaimed: "What was Rama's misconduct to deserve such exile? Was it not stupid on the part of the old king to listen to Kaikeyi's words? I do not recognise Dasaratha as my father. Rama is my brother, my father, and my lord. He is all in all to me". Sumantra reported that even the horses refused to move forward leaving Rama behind. Dasaratha repented of what he had done at the instance of Kaikeyi, without consulting friends and counsellors. He wanted to be taken to where Rama was, as he could not remain without him even for a moment. He called out to Rama, Sita and Lakshmana asking them to come near him as his end was approaching. When Kausalya also began to lament, Sumantra consoled her pointing out that Lakshmana was there to take care of Rama and Sita and that Sita would love the forest life as much as the life in a city. He said that Sita displayed no fear, but on the contrary was happy and joyful when he left her. Sumantra's words did not mitigate Kausalya's grief and she indulged in a bitter tirade against the king for the injustice he had perpetrated in the name of truth and dharma.

Dasaratha had no answer to Kausalya's accusations. He remembered what he had done long ago when he was learning archery and was trying to judge the distance and the direction of the target merely from the sounds heard. He begged Kausalya not to increase his anguish by probing an already wounded heart. "Do not flog a dead horse," he said; and Kausalya realised her follly in taunting the king and begged him for forgiveness. Thereupon Dasaratha narrated to her the old, old incident. In experimenting with his skill in archery, he had killed the son of two blind parents, by mistaking the sound of water filling a pitcher for the sound produced by an elephant drinking water to quench its thirst. He shuddered at the enormity of his crime and with trembling steps and a sorrow-stricken and penitent heart, he communicated to the blind sage and his wife his folly. They had cursed him to undergo a similar separation from his son. He now saw that the exile of Rama and the separation from him were the fulfilment of that curse. Dasaratha wept bitterly at the calamity that had overtaken him, and at midnight his life ebbed away, with his last thoughts fixed on his beloved son, whom he had sent away to the forest to please Kaikeyi. On the morrow, the entire palace became immersed in gloom and despondency. Kausalya charged Kaikeyi with being the cause of so much suffering and misery not only for them but for the whole kingdom. She wanted to put an end to her own life then and there so that she might accompany her husband on his last journey, but the ladies around her took her away from the place. Meanwhile, the ministers had made arrangements to preserve the king's body in an oil receptacle till the arrival of Bharata. The people who had collected together, when they heard the news of the king's death, condemned Kaikeyi in no uncertain terms.

Message to Bharata

As a kingdom without a king would be prey to many

evils, it was necessary to send word immediately to Bharata and Satrughna who were with their maternal grandfather. Messengers were *accordingly despatched to bring* them without delay. On the very night they reached the capital of Kekaya's kingdom, prince Bharata had dreamt horrible dreams and was dreading what evil was going to befall him. He saw his father, covered with dust and with dishevelled hair, falling from the summit of a mountain into a pond of filth, and drinking oil with his hand and laughing hideously. He saw the ocean dry and the moon dropping down from the sky and the tusks of the favourite royal elephant broken to pieces. He saw the king seated on an iron plank surrounded by dark ladies who were beating *him*. *Finaly*, he saw him proceeding south in an ass-drawn chariot. A fierce rakshasa in red clothes was dragging the king along. Bharata narrated his dream in detail to his friends and shook with fear.

The messengers from Dasaratha's court merely told Bharata that he was wanted back in Ayodhya. They did not inform him of the exile of Rama and the death of Dasaratha. Bharata started without delay. A forced march of seven days brought him in sight of Ayodhya. Even from a distance, he noticed that there was no life in the city. It looked deserted. The crowded gardens were empty. There was no movement of people along the roads. The snorting of elephants and the neighing of horses were not heard. Bharata suspected that something had gone seriously wrong; and in this frame of mind he entered the city.

Kaikeyi's Exultation and Bharata's Grief

Not finding his father in his apartments, he hastened to his mother's residence. She took her beloved son on her lap and questioned him about his welfare and that of her father and her brother. But Bharata wanted to know why he had been sent for so urgently and said he was surprised that his father Dasaratha was not there. Without even a

tinge of sorrow, Kaikeyi told him that the king had gone the way of all mortals. On hearing this, Bharata swooned and dropped down. Kaikeyi helped him to recover and his first words when he regained his senses were that Rama and Lakshmana were fortunate as they were present during the last moments of the king's life. He wanted to run to Rama and clasp his feet. But Kaikeyi told him that Rama, Lakshmana and Sita had been sent away to the forest and that the king died with Rama's name on his lips. The news of the banishment was the second shock to Bharata. He entreated his mother to tell him why Rama had been banished. "Did he steal anyone's wealth? Did he ill-treat any poor man? Did he covet other women?" Gloating over her achievements, Kaikeyi said: "No, child, Rama did not commit any of those sins. He would not even look at other women. When I heard that the king wanted to crown him as Yuvaraj, I asked that you should be crowned instead and that Rama should be sent away to the forest. Bound by his own past promises, Dasaratha had no option but to carry out my wishes. The kingdom is now yours for you to rule. This is the time for joy, not grief."

Bharata exclaimed: "What have you done, Oh! mother? You have brought untold suffering and misery to this family. You have brought about its ruin. You have killed Dasaratha and banished Rama. What a sinful woman you are! You are wicked. You are cruel. Father did not know that you were the embodiment of evil when he accepted your hand. Rama was most devoted to you. Kausalya treated you as her own sister. Why did you embark on this dreadful scheme? Without the strength of Rama and Lakshmana, where would this kingdom be? You have completely taken leave of your senses. I will not obey your directions. I shall go immediately to my brother, bring him back, place him on the throne and be his most humble servant. You have deserted the path of dharma. You have no place in heaven with my father. Go to hell. On account of you, infamy will attach itself to

me for all time to come. What possessed you to inflict such cruelty on the good Kausalya. Rama will return to Ayodhya forthwith and I shall take his place in the forest." Throwing away his ornaments, with dishevelled clothes and with eyes red with anger, Bharata chastised his mother again and again for her wicked folly. He could not control himself and once again he fainted.

Bharata Meets Kausalya

On recovering, Bharata accompanied by Satrughna went to Kausalya. Kausalya tauntingly told Bharata that Kaikeyi had secured for him the kingdom that he coveted, but that she did not understand why her son was exiled and what good Kaikeyi thought would come out of it. Bharata fell at Kausalya's feet and entreated her to consider whether it was right on her part even to think that he was to blame in any way. "I know absolutely nothing about these happenings. Do you not know the extent of my atachment to Rama? I swear by everything that I hold sacred that I had no hand in the affair. He who was responsible for Rama's exile will surely reap the fruits of his sins. He will go the same way as those who commit the most heinous crimes." After making several similar protestations, the weeping Bharata dropped down senseless on the ground. Kausalya melted at this sight, took Bharata to herself and assured him that she was satisfied that he had nothing to do with Rama's banishment to the forest.

Bharata's Resolve

Meanwhile Vasishta came and reminded them that the funeral rites for the dead king had to be performed. They were all carried out in the prescribed manner. On the twelfth day, the sraddha ceremony was gone through and while Satrughna was conversing with Bharata about the malignity of fate towards them, Manthara, the hunch-back maid, made her appearance, at the distant door, in gorgeous and bejewelled dress. The gate-keepers at once

seized her and informed Satrughna. He caught hold of her, threw her on the ground and dragged her. The palace echoed with her screams and Kaikeyi ran to her help. Satrughna threatened Kaikeyi also, when she attempted to secure the maid's release. She thereupon sought Bharata's protection. Bharata intervened and reminded Satrughna that the killing of women was forbidden and that Rama would never approve of such conduct. Thereupon Satrughna released her.

On the morning of the fourteenth day, the privy councillors told Bharata that it was high time that he should be anointed as king, but Bharata declined the honour. He stated that they must all go and bring back Rama. He would go instantly to the forest to beg Rama to return and he gave orders to the troops to get ready for the march. Vasishta came to the king's audience hall and called for a meeting of the councillors and princes. When all had gathered, Vasishta requested Bharata to accept the kingdom, which was given to him by his father and his brother. Bharata sternly but politely declined the offer, expressing astonishment at Vasishta's request that he should take upon himself the rulership of Ayodhya. It would be most unrighteous and improper for him to assume sovereignty. He was not responsible for his mother's conduct. It was Rama and Rama alone who was fit to rule over them and not he. This stern and solemn declaration of Bharata pleased the assembly and they applauded him for his nobility and greatness. Marching orders were then given.

To the Forest in Search of Rama

All of them started for the forest, including the three queens Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi. They soon reached Guha's territory. Guha, mistaking the intentions of Bharata, made warlike preparations and placed his men on the banks of the river Ganga to prevent the party from crossing over. He then approached Bharata with the

customary offer of hospitality. Sumantra announced him to the prince and he was conducted into his presence. Guha asked Bharata frankly what his real intentions were and why he had come there with such a large army. The prince felt humiliated by the very thought which was at the back of Guha's mind and he told the chieftain that he was on his way to Rama to bring him back to the kingdom. To him Rama was his own father. Guha was delighted at Bharata's reply and extolled the prince in these words. "You have no equal in this world. You propose to return the kingdom which was given to you when you sought it not. You have earned permanent fame by this noble act". Guha then showed Bharata the crude bed on which Rama and Sita had slept on the night prior to their departure to the forest and narrated to him the intimate talks they had had that night and told him how next morning Rama and Lakshmana with matted hair and hermit robes had crossed the Ganga in his boat to resume their journey. When he heard these details, Bharata was bowed down with grief. Kausalya lifted him up saying that he was the only hope and protector of the family and that he should not break down in this manner. Bharata recovered and plied Guha with a number of questions about the exiles. The chieftain showed them the *ingudi* tree whose juice had been used by Rama and Lakshamana for matting their hair. Bharata wondered whether this world was real and whether what he was hearing was true or a mere dream. If even Rama and Sita could be reduced to such a plight, was not fate invincible? Was he himself not the cause of all this misery? Was not Lakshmana fortunate and blessed in that he was privileged to keep company with Rama even in distress? Was not Sita the noblest example of womanhood? So Bharata reflected and he took this solemn vow: "From this day onwards, the bare earth shall be my bed, tree-bark shall be my garment and only roots and fruits shall be my food till I succeed in bringing back my brother to the kingdom which is his and by no means mine."

Bharata and Bharadwaja

After a distressful night, Bharata's party crossed the river with the help of boats supplied by Guha and, reaching the other bank, they proceeded to the hermitage of the great sage Bharadwaja. Like Guha, Bharadwaja also suspected Bharata and asked him why he had come in search of Rama and whether he was actuated by any evil design. Bharata exclaimed: "Sage, if even you suspect me, I am undone. I swear that I have come to take Rama back to his kingdom and establish him on the throne." The sage thereupon assured the young Bharata that he really had no doubt about his sincerity, but wanted to make sure of his steadfastness of purpose. And with his yogic powers, Bharadwaja gave a royal repast to Bharata and his retinue of followers. Viands and wines were provided in abundance, and the celestial nymphs danced and entertained the company. Most of the guests became tipsy with joy and even thought of staying there permanently without proceeding to the forest or returning to Ayodhya. Next morning, however, Bharata wanted to leave and before leaving made due obeisance to the sage and invoked his blessing. The prince introduced the three queens to him in suitable terms. He described his mother Kaikeyi as the woman who gave birth to a sinner like himself and who, in her unbounded ambition for material prosperity, was willing to perpetrate the most cruel wrong. But the sage checked Bharata, and advised him not to speak of his mother in that way and he observed that really Rama's exile was going to bring happiness to the gods and the rishis. Bharata bowed and resumed his journey towards Chitrakuta.

Chitrakuta

From a distance, Bharata saw the hill in which Rama lived. Beside it flowed the river Mandakini. The forest in which the hill was situated was a lovely one full of trees, hillocks, rivers, rivulets and waterfalls; tame and wild

animals abounded, carefree birds chirruped and sang melodious songs. The trees were all full of flowers and laden with fruits. The advancing party saw smoke ascending into the sky from a quarter on the hill and guessed that this might be the abode of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita. Just then, Rama was drawing the attention of Sita to the beauties of the Chitrakuta forest; some ascetics were bathing in the river, some were standing in reverence facing the Sun and worshipping him with uplifted hands and some were sitting on the banks of the river lost in meditation.

While Rama was seated on the mountain slope next to Sita and was conversing with her intimately about the grandeur of nature, sounds were heard at some distance and the forest animals were seen running helter-skelter. Rama asked Lakshmana to see what it was all about; perhaps it was some king or prince who was coming on a hunting expedition. Lakshmana climbed up a tree and saw far away in the east a regular army marching towards them. He asked Rama to extinguish the fire at once and take Sita into the cave and be prepared with bow and arrow and armour while he would keep a watch on the coming hosts. Rama asked him to find out whose army it was and Lakshmana exclaimed, as it drew nearer, that it was the chariot of Bharata with the Ikshvaku flag that was speeding towards them. "We must get ready to fight," he said, and he was prepared himself to kill Bharata instantly for the injustice he had perpetrated. With his death, Kaikeyi would put an end to her own life and the earth would be rid of two monsters of evil. Lakshmana ranted away in this manner.

Rama was highly displeased when he heard these words of Lakshmana, and said: "Having made a promise to my father that I would resign the kingdom, do you imagine that I am going to take it up again, incurring also the sin of killing Bharata? If I seek the kingdom, it is really for you my brothers and not for myself. I do not care even for the glory of Indra if I can only secure

it by following the path of *adharma*. What is prosperity without you, Bharata and Satrughna? I think Bharata is coming here grieving over what his mother has done and that his mission is to take me back to the kingdom. He is not capable of entertaining any evil intentions towards us. Why do you suspect his motives? If you are harsh to Bharata, I will treat it as harshness shown to me. I feel so sure about Bharata that I know that if I ask him even to give the kingdom to you, he will do so readily in obedience to my wishes." Lakshmana was covered with shame and shrunk within himself at these words of Rama. He said feebly that perhaps it was Dasaratha himself who was coming to see them. While they were talking thus with each other, Satrunjaya, the favourite elephant of Dasaratha, came in sight at the head of the marching army, but without the white umbrella of the king and this made Rama think that some evil had befallen Dasaratha.

Bharata halted the army and his retinue at a distance and made a search for Rama with Satrughna and Guha and the preceptors. "There will be no peace for me till I see my beloved Rama and Lakshmana and the great Sita. There will be no peace for me till I see my Rama and touch his feet with my head. There will be no peace for me till I take him back and crown him king." So saying, he wended his way through the forest through dense trees and along mountain slopes till he reached the foot of the Chitrakuta hill and saw near at hand, the rings of smoke issuing from Rama's hermitage.

Rama and Bharata Meet

Bharata was the first to reach the thatched cottage which was spread over with soft antelope skins. He saw the weapons of the brothers shining in the corner and observed the fire-altar in the centre. As he approached nearer and nearer, he saw Rama distinctly. The latter was wearing bark garments. A deer skin covered his body. He was radiant with a spiritual halo round his

head. Bharata ran towards him to grasp his holy feet. But even before he reached him, he fell on the ground in his excitement exclaiming "Brother", and unable to utter anything more. Satrughna also prostrated. Rama embraced them both and was moved to tears. Sumantra and Guha also fell at his feet. This affectionate meeting between the brothers was so touching that tears coursed down the cheeks of even the forest dwellers in the vicinity.

Rama raised Bharata to him and began to question him about their father's welfare and asked why he had come to the forest leaving the old king behind. He also made enquiries about Vasishta, Sumitra and Kaikeyi. He asked Bharata a series of questions about the welfare of the kingdom and the people, the way in which he was discharging his royal duties, the due conduct of worship in temples, reverence to Brahmins, the acquisition of friends, the elimination of enemies, and so on and so forth.

Bharata answered: "How can one who is bereft of dharma like myself, practise *rajadharma?* The prime dharma among us is that when the eldest son is alive, his juniors should not become kings. Remember this, brother, come back to Ayodhya and be crowned king for the sake of the prosperity of our family, if for nothing else. Even before I returned to Ayodhya from the Kekaya kingdom, our father had died, heart-broken. Get up, Rama, make oblations to the departed. You are dearest to Dasaratha and has it not been said that even oblations of water offered by the dear ones increase the happiness of the dead in the other world?"

When he heard that his father was dead, Rama was consumed with immeasurable grief and cursed the fate which prevented him from offering the last rites to the deceased. Sita burst into tears. All of them went to the river and offered oblations of water and cakes of *ingudi* to the departed soul. On their return to the hermitage, Rama moved freely among the assembled people, prostrating before some, embracing others and enquiring about the

welfare of all. Then the three mothers met Rama. Kausalya bemoaned the fate of the dead king who after having enjoyed a whole kingdom as his own had now to be content with crude *ingudi* cakes for his food in the other world. She wondered why her heart was not shattered under the weight of so much misery. The other queens also lamented with her. Rama fell at their feet and so did Lakshmana and Sita. Then Bharata came to Rama and stood reverently before him. The people were eager to hear what Bharata would say to his brother.

Bharata's Entreaties

Then began a long conversation between the two brothers, Bharata insisting on Rama's return and Rama persisting in staying in the forest. Rama first asked Bharata why he came all the way to the forest dressed like a recluse. Bharata took hold of Rama's hands and said: "By listening to the words of my mother Kaikeyi, the king has done a great wrong by sending you to the forest. My mother has become a widow and will go to hell for what she has done. Come back, Rama, and crown yourself. The people, ministers and counsellors—all beg of you to do this." So saying, Bharata bent down and touched Rama's feet. Rama replied: "Child, how do you expect me to do what is wrong? I see no fault in Kaikeyi. It is your immaturity of mind that makes you accuse her. The sovereign has ordered that I should live in the forest like a hermit and this was also endorsed by the mother. It is my duty to obey their commands. You must have the kingdom and I must dwell in the forest. Such was the division made for us. You shall enjoy your share and I shall enjoy mine."

The whole night was passed in grieving. Next morning, after the ablutions were over, Bharata again addressed Rama. "My mother's wish has been fulfilled and she has obtained the kingdom for me. But I give it to you, please accept it. I am unworthy to be the ruler.

How can a pigmy like me take your place." Rama in reply spoke these consoling words: "We are all playthings in the hands of fate. Wealth vanishes, elevation is followed by humiliation, separation comes in the wake of union, death terminates life. All men are victims of old age and death. Time moves on and cannot be recalled. Day follows night and night follows day and life becomes shorter and shorter. Death is ever present with us. Just as, in a stream, two logs of wood become attached to each other for a short time and then separate, so is the real relationship between men, their wives and children. What matters in this world is not prosperity or happiness but righteousness. It is by good deeds alone that our father has reached the abode of heaven. He lived a rich grand life. There is no need for us to lament over his death. He ordered you to take the kingdom and it is our primary duty to obey his command. Similarly, I should pay heed to his wishes. I cannot under any circumstances transgress his words."

"Who is there like you, Rama," exclaimed Bharata. "Joy and sorrow do not seem to effect you in the least. Such conduct may be right for you but I am unable to comprehend it. What is there in common between forest life and the rulership of a kingdom, between the duty of protection and the life of a recluse? The first duty or dharma for a Kshatriya is to accept the rulership. In the four stages of a man's life, the *grihastha* stage has been stated to be the best. I cannot accept the kingdom under any circumstances. We will crown you king here and now. Show mercy towards me. If you insist on staying in the forest, I shall also remain with you. Never again shall I return to Ayodhya." These words of Bharata sent a thrill of joy through the preceptors, the ministers and the queens; and all of them joined Bharata in entreating Rama to return.

Rama observed: "What you say is not right, my dear brother. When our father married your mother, he pro-

mised the kingdom to the son born to her. Later on, he gave her two boons and she made her choice. As his sons, it is our duty to save our father from the hell to which he would go if his words proved false. All of us must discharge our respective duties according to the king's directions. You must be the ruler of the kingdom; I shall be the head of the denizens of the forest Let the royal umbrella be raised over your head; the shade of the trees will protect me from the sun. Satrughna will be your companion; Lakshmana will be mine. Thus, allotting to ourselves our respective duties, we shall make a joint effort to make our father a truthful man."

Jabali's Counsel

Sage Jabali who was present at the gathering advised Rama not to persist in his fruitless resolve. He said: "What you say is appropriate for an ignorant man, but not for a wise man. Who is whose relation?—I ask. Man is born alone and dies alone. That man is mad who thinks of father and mother as permanent entities. Parents, houses and wealth are all ephemeral. Why consider them? Enjoy the pleasures of the immediate present which are within your reach. Let the unknown past and the unknowable future take care of themselves. Really you are nothing to Dasaratha nor he to you. The so-called father is nothing but a remote cause for your existence. He has disappeared and there is no need to worry any more about him. Do the dead eat? Do the oblations we give reach them? The ceremonies ordained for the dead are merely the contrivances of clever people to get something for themselves by way of presents or gifts. There is no hereafter, O! Rama. Think of the present alone. Ignore altogether what is unseen. Take the kingdom offered to you by Bharata and enjoy its pleasures".

Rama Chides Jabali

This atheistic preaching met with the stern disappro-

val of Rama who upbraided Jabali for his impious philosophy. He said: "It is conduct alone that shows whether a man is good or bad, pure or impure and whether he comes of good stock or not. What you have said makes me think that you are un-Aryan in your outlook and that you are really an unholy man in an ascetic garb". He repelled Jabali's doctrines and proclaimed that right conduct has for its base truth and dharma and that he who deviates from them is bound to come to grief not only in this world but hereafter. Jabali thereupon assured Rama that he was not an atheist by any means and that what he had said was only to induce Rama to go back to Ayodhya. Vasishta intervened at this stage and pacified the angry Rama and assured him that Jabali's words were prompted only by his desire to see Rama in the capital. He then gave a short account of the illustrious ancestors of Rama in the Ikshvaku line and wound up with the suggestion that Rama should reconsider his decision, as lineal primogeniture was the rule in the family and there was no instance when a younger prince had become king while the elder was alive. It was not proper for Rama to deviate from this family custom. Besides one's parents, there were also one's *acharyas* who should be considered as *gurus* and therefore Rama should listen to his words. If he did so, he would not be transgressing right conduct. His brothers and the mothers begged him to return to the capital and so did all the people that had assembled there. It was Rama's duty to listen to their unanimous appeal.

But even this eloquent appeal of Vasishta did not have any effect on Rama, who insisted on keeping the promise he had given to his father. Bharata tried a last remedy. He said he would then and there begin a fast until Rama yielded to his importunities. But Rama dissuaded him and advised him to go back to Ayodhya. Bharata then made a fervent appeal to the people present to beg Rama to relent but they said they were unable to do anything as Rama was determined on the course he

had chosen for himself. And when Bharata stated that he would also stay behind, Rama pointed out to him that he would not then be carrying out his father's words.

The Holy Sandals

Being bound in this manner, Bharata felt helpless and did not know what to do. The assembled sages advised Bharata to accept the situation as they had plans for the speedy destruction of Ravana. Once again Bharata implored Rama to listen to his entreaties, but Rama was adamant in his resolve. Finally, Bharata requested Rama to stand on his pair of sandals so that he might take them to Ayodhya and carry on the administration in the name of Rama with their help. Rama acceded to this request and gave his pair of sandals to Bharata. Bharata accepted them and made this solemn declaration. "With matted hair and bark clothes, I shall spend the fourteen years outside Ayodhya living on frugal food and eagerly looking forward to your return, O! Rama. Your sandals will represent and symbolise all regal authority. If you do not return on the next day after the fourteen years are over, I will enter the fire". Rama gave his approval, embraced the young Bharata and Satrughana and gave this farewell message. "Protect your mother Kaikeyi. Do not be angry with her. Sita and myself enjoin you to do this."

Bharata's Return

The parting made all of them sad beyond measure. Bharata placed the sandals on his head and left for Ayodhya; and Rama went into his cottage. On the return journey, Bharata paid his respects once again to Bharadwaja and crossing the Yamuna and Ganga entered Srinigiberapura from where he saw with sadness the deserted city of Ayodhya which was bereft of all life and activity.

Leaving their mothers in Ayodhya, the brothers Bharata and Satrughna went to Nandigrama, Bharata

carrying Rama's sandals on his head. He told all the elders assembled that the kingdom was given to him by his brother and that he was his trustee for carrying on the administration during his absence. He ordered the royal umbrella to be unfurled over the enthroned sandals as the auspicious emblems of Rama's rule. He said that he was too weak to carry the burden on his own shoulders and therefore reposed it on Rama's sandals. He assumed the robes of a hermit and carried on the administration under the aegis of the holy sandals. He regarded every order he issued as one proceeding from Rama himself. The sandals were the objects of his daily worship.

Visit to Atri and Anasuya

After Bharata's departure, Rama observed that the rishis in the ashrama were talking to one another in whispers and he could guess that the talk was about himself. He asked their leader what was the trouble or inconvenience they were experiencing and whether he or Sita or Lakshmana was guilty of any derelictions of duty. The Kulapati assured him that they were not guilty of any transgression but that the real trouble was that from the moment of his advent into the forest the rakshasas led by one Khara were oppressing them greatly and were offering obstructions of all kinds to the performance of their rituals and tapas. Therefore the rishis wanted to move to another place not far away. They took leave of Rama and settled down in a fresh abode in the neighbourhood.

Rama did not wish to stay at the place which reminded him of the visit of Bharata and Satrughna and the mothers. Therefore, he and Lakshmana and Sita left for the hermitage of the sage Atri. The sage received him as a son and offered him hospitality with his own hands. He welcomed Lakshmana and Sita also. Just then came Anasuya, the aged wife of Atri who had achieved world-wide fame for her unparalleled virtues of chastity and austerity. Atri introduced her to them in glowing terms

as a supreme example of chaste womanhood. With a frail, wrinkled and stooping frame, with silvery hair on her head and trembling from weakness, she approached them. Rama directed Sita to fall at her feet and receive her blessing. Anasuya accepted Sita's prostrations and congratulated her on her resolve to accompany her husband and share his life of suffering and distress. She said that this was the proper ideal for Aryan women to pursue. A woman who held her husband dear and worshipped him whether he lived in a city or in a forest and whether he was of right conduct or not would meet with prosperity; others who deserted their husbands in times of trouble and who behaved as their masters were bound to earn evil repute. Sita said she fully appreciated Anasuya's words pointing out that it was a reinforcement of what she had already heard from her elders in her parents' house as well as in Ayodhya. Even if a husband failed to achieve high standards of right conduct he must be respected and loved. Was it strange then that she adored Rama, her lord, who was of praiseworthy conduct, full of compassion and love, steadfast in his attachment, and possessed of self-control? He regarded every woman he saw as his own mother. "I know," said Sita, "that there is no other austerity or penance ordained for a woman than service to her husband. That is how Savitri, yourself and Rohini have achieved everlasting fame". These words of young Sita transported Anasuya with joy and she said: "By the practice of many austerities have I achieved great merit with the help of which I shall protect you. What shall I give you?" Sita replied that Anasuya's affection was by itself sufficient for her welfare. Anasuya then gave her an unfading garland, many jewels and clothes and some ever-fragrant cosmetics. She then asked her to tell her all the details of her wedding about which she had only heard. Sita related the story of the breaking of the bow by Rama and specially mentioned that when her father had offered her hand in marriage to him, Rama

had insisted on the approval of his father before anything could be done. Anasuya was immensely pleased with Sita's account.

By this time, the sun was setting; the birds were seeking their nests; the hermits were returning to their cottages with wet clothes and water-filled *kamandalus*. Smoke was rising from the sacrificial altars, and darkness was coming on. Anasuya therefore asked Sita to wear the dress and put on the jewels she had given her and go to her husband to serve him. Sita obeyed. Rama was overjoyed with the love thus shown to Sita by Anasuya; it was a rare gift for ordinary mortals. The royal guests spent the night in the hermitage, and when day broke, they took leave of all sages. Before Rama departed, the sages reminded him of the existence of cruel rakshasas in the forest whom he should exterminate, and pointed out the way which the exiles should take to reach the great Dandaka forest.

CHAPTER III

ARANYA KANDA

Rama Enters Dandaka

ENTERING the great Dandaka forest, Rama saw an extensive hermitage. It was full of anchorites in different stages of spiritual progress. From near and far came the sound of Vedas being chanted; Agni was worshipped in many places. Deer and other animals roamed freely. The trees were tall and laden with fruits. Rama unstrung his bow and with all humility entered the holy place. The great rishis were overjoyed on seeing him, Lakshmana, and Vaidehi and pronounced on them hearty benedictions. The guests were taken to an appropriate hut and

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offered the usual homage of fruits and flowers and water. With due reverence to Rama, the sages congratulated themselves on their opportunity to welcome such distinguished royal guests. They knew that Rama was indeed their king and their protector.

As soon as day dawned, Rama took leave of the sages and penetrated into the wild forest. In the depths of the forest, they encountered a fierce-looking cannibal rakshasa with a stentorian voice. His mouth gaped open and a tiger skin dripping with blood covered his body. He carried with him several animals which he had killed; and on his spear was a fleshy tusker's head from which drops of blood trickled down. With a roar, the rakshasa hurled himself upon Rama, Lakshmana and Sita. He snatched Sita and, placing her on his lap, questioned her as to who her companions were. He said that they who were robed like sanyasis had no need for a young lady. Looking at Sita, he exclaimed "I shall kill them both and make you my wife". Sita trembled with fear. Rama became distressed at her plight and bitterly exclaimed that Kaikeyi's evil wishes were being fulfilled. Lakshmana, however, was undaunted and did not lose courage.

Rama thereupon asked the monster who he was. He replied that his name was Viradha and gave them the history of his life, alluding to a boon received from Lord Brahma that weapons and arrows would not harm him. Anxious to lose no time however, Rama sped his arrows against him, but failed to harm him. The rakshasa then attacked Rama and Lakshmana with his spear but the attack was repelled by them. They resorted to swords but the rakshasa swept both of them up and ran away from the field of combat, carrying them with him.

It was now Sita's turn to bemoan the fate that had befallen her and her husband. However, ere long, Rama and Lakshmana severed the giant's arms and the rakshasa fell prostrate on the ground. The brothers gave him a number of blows, but though they pressed him down and

tried to strangle him, he did not die. Rama then resolved to bury him alive. A pit was dug and he was thrown into it and Rama stood on his neck. The rakshasa then remembered *his life in the previous birth* and mentioned that he was a gandharva named Tumburu who had become a rakshasa owing to the curse of Kubera. He directed Rama to go and see the great sage Sarabhanga, who was living close by, who would confer on them every blessing and prosperity. The pit was closed over Viradha's body, the curse came to an end, the gandharva assumed his original form and took leave of the princes with respectful salutations.

They then proceeded on their way and just as Rama was about to enter the ashrama of Sarabhanga, Indra who had come on a visit to the sage was bidding him farewell. He left the hermitage hurriedly, saying that Rama must not converse with him till he had achieved the gigantic task before him. Sarabhanga then met Rama and told him that he was waiting for his arrival before leaving for the other world. So saying, the sage gave Rama his blessings, then entered the *homa* fire and disappeared in blazing glory.

In the course of Rama's wanderings in the forest, several groups of sages in different grades of yogic and spiritual progress gathered round him and reminded him of his kingly duties as the protector of the good and the holy. They said that they felt helpless against the wicked rakshasas who were indulging in orgies of cruelty and killing. They implored in one voice: "Save us from the wicked". With characteristic humility, Rama replied that it was not proper that they should request him in that manner to discharge his duties, when they should issue commands which he was bound to obey. He gave them his word that he would do their bidding. The princes proceeded on their journey, paid their respects to the sage Sutikshna *in his ashrama and stayed there for the night.* Next morning, they took leave of him as they were desirous

of paying homage to the other rishis living in different parts of the forest.

As they were leaving, Sita, while handing to the brothers their weapons, uttered a mild protest. She said that untruthfulness, illicit love and anger without cause, were the three chief vices that ruined men. The princes were happily bereft of the first two. But they seemed to be exhibiting the third by promising the rishis that they would put an end to the rakshasas. This was inappropriate to the life of penance which they were to lead in the forest under their father's orders. She reminded Rama of the story she had heard of a hermit who was given a wood-cutter's knife by the God Indra to be used for clearing the forest footpaths of over-grown thorny bushes and creepers. The hermit gradually led himself into the use of the weapon for other purposes as well and thus lost his spiritual merit. A bow in the hands of a kshatriya was like a faggot near fire; a conflagration was almost inevitable. A life of penance in a forest and a kshatriya's bow were incongruous. Having said these words, Sita restrained herself and told her husband that what she had said was born of her affection and love for him and not of any feeling that she was in a position to dictate to him or criticise his actions.

This loving admonition of Sita drew forth from Rama a spirited defence of that which he had promised the assemblage of sages. The virtuous, the pious, and the holy deserved to be protected from the aggression of the wicked and the cruel. His duty was there even without their request. It became all the more insistent when the sages specially sought his help. "I am prepared," said Rama, "to forsake my life or even your dear self and Lakshmana, but I shall never go back on my word. I am however pleased with your affectionate remonstrance. It is only they who are near and dear to us that seek to give us advice."

The princes continued on their journey. They travelled a long distance into the forest seeing many moun-

tains, rivers and lakes and encountering many wild animals and passing through many hermitages. As they passed through each hermitage, Rama was worshipped by the sages whom he met. The three pilgrims stayed in the several ashramas for different periods at their convenience. Ten years were spent in this manner. They again came to the ashrama of Sutikshna and questioned him about the whereabouts of the ashrama of the famous sage Agastya so that they might go there and bow before him and receive his blessings. Sutikshna indicated the location and the route to be taken. After visiting the brother of Agastya on the way, they arrived at the abode of Agastya. The sage was the foremost of his class. Once, when two rakshasa brothers Vatapi and Ilvala had tried to kill him by treachery, he foiled their attempt and killed them in turn by his spiritual powers. Rama drew the attention of his brother to the rising smoke from various altars, the greasy leaves of the over-hanging trees and the hermits' bark garments hung on the branches. Peace reigned supreme and they heard the merry chirrup of birds. Agastya, in his abode, was invulnerable from attack even by the rakshasas; the prowess of his saintliness was a terror to them. Even the Vindhya mountain was believed to have ceased its further growth at his command. He was a true benefactor of humanity and always had the welfare of the people at heart. To see him and to worship him was a privilege. Rama said that it was meet that they should spend the rest of the forest life enjoined upon them in such a holy place. So saying he directed his brother to announce their arrival to the sage.

Agastya expressed great delight at the visit of such distinguished guests and sent one of his disciples to bring them inside. As they approached the altar, they were warmly welcomed by the sage himself. They prostrated and then sat down at his behest. After finishing his customary worship of the deities, the sage entertained the visitors according to the vanaprastha code. Further, he

gave Rama a mighty bow, two quivers, many arrows and a sword, with blessing for future victory. These weapons had originally belonged to Lord Vishnu. The fatigue of the journey was discernible in the two brothers and in Sita. Agastya observed this and expatiated on the high ideals and lofty example of Sita, who had given up a life of comfort and luxury to accompany her husband, thus enduring the hardships and sufferings of a forest life. She was as steadfast and devoted to her husband as Arundhati to her lord Vasishta. The sage said that the ashrama was enriched and sanctified by their presence. With due humility Rama observed that such words of praise from so great a sage were real blessings and proved his abundant grace. He then asked Agastya whereabouts in the forest they could reside for the remaining period of their exile. The sage suggested that Panchavati, a few miles away, might be a suitable abode, and that, as most of the ordained period of forest life was over, Rama might at its completion go back from Panchavati to his kingdom and live happily after fulfilling his word given to his father. Saying this, the sage showed them the way to Panchavati.

The princes and Sita reached Panchavati, and there they saw a huge bird which they took to be a rakshasa in disguise, but the bird introduced itself to them as Jatayu, brother of Sampathi, who had been a friend of Dasaratha. The bird offered to keep them company and to protect Sita to the best of its ability, whenever Rama and Lakshmana happened to be absent.

A nice thatched hut was quickly erected by Lakshmana at Panchavati, on the banks of the Godavari river, on a level site commanding a beautiful view of the surrounding forest, hills and dales. Trees with flowers and fruits grew thickly on all sides. The birds piped sweet melodies. It was a lovely spot well suited for their stay. On seeing this abode, Rama was overcome with joy. He embraced Lakshmana with deep affection, saying: "My satisfaction is great indeed at what you have done so well.

The noble qualities *which characterise you make me think* that our father still lives, and is not dead" They lived happily at Panchavati for some time in surroundings of entrancing natural beauty.

The agreeable season of Hemanta arrived. The sun was neither too hot nor too mild. Rama and Sita enjoyed themselves, bathing frequently in the cool waters of the Godavari. Lakshmana's thoughts were concentrated on Bharata and the rigid life of renunciation that he led, discarding all pleasures and comforts and spending his days as a recluse. He wondered how one so good could have been born to Kaikeyi The noble-hearted Rama at once reprimanded Lakshmana for his disrespect towards his mother and said that even his own firm resolve to endure the forest life sometimes wavered, when he recollected the affection of Bharata and his sweet and gentle words.

One day when they were in their cottage, a sister of Ravana, named Surpanakha, happened to come there by accident. She had an ugly face, hideous eyes, a huge waist and copper-coloured hair. On looking at Rama's form and beauty, she became enamoured of him. She was attracted by his comely face, slender waist, broad eyes, lovely hair, graceful carriage, dulcet tones, and shining purity. Overpowering love seized her. She questioned the princes as to who they were and why they had come into the region inhabited by the rakshasas. Rama, who was a votary of *truth and never deviated from it under any circumstance,* answered her questions fully and truthfully and in his turn asked the lady who she was. She stated that she was Surpanakha, capable of assuming any form, and that she was the sister of the famous Ravana, the sleeping Kumbhakarna and the righteous Vibhishana, and of Khara and Dushana. She proclaimed her passion and offered to become his wife According to her, Sita was not a fit wife for him, as she was weak, slender and fragile.

This proposal of marriage from Surpanakha provoked Rama to laugh heartily and he decided to have some fun

at her expense. He told her: "I am married and your position as second wife would be a source of sorrow to yourself. Here is my brother Lakshmana who has no wife. He is young and will make a suitable husband for you". Taking Rama at his word, she turned her attentions to Lakshmana. But Lakshmana referred her back to Rama saying, "How can you seek to derive comfort or happiness by becoming the wife of a servant like myself? If you approach Rama properly, he will even forsake Sita and take you in her place, being struck with such beauty as yours". Thinking that it was really Sita who stood in the way of her attaining her object, she rushed against Sita with the idea of killing her on the spot. Rama's anger was now roused and mildly rebuking Lakshmana for his froliesomeness, he asked him to disfigure her. Thereupon Lakshmana cut off her nose and ears with his sword. On receipt of these injuries, Surpanakha fled from the place, bleeding and wailing. She went to her brother Khara and told him her tale of woe and demanded nothing short of the heads of Rama and *Lakshmana* for the humiliation they had inflicted on her. Khara's anger knew no bounds. He despatched veteran warriors against the brothers.

On seeing them coming, Rama asked Lakshmana to take care of Sita and he got ready to give them battle single-handed. The rakshasa warriors laughed at Rama's audacity but their laughter was short-lived. Rama's arrows pierced them one by one and they fell dead, blood spurting from their chests Surpanakha, who had witnessed the encounter, again rushed to her brother and wept bitterly at the death of the rakshasas, leaving the wrong done to her unavenged. She rolled on the ground in front of Khara, loudly lamenting her fate. She threatened to put an end to her life, if Khara did not avenge her properly. Khara consoled her and with an army of 14,000 rakshasas, under the leadership of Dushana, marched against Rama and Lakshmana with a tremendous array

of trumpets, flags, shields, swords and maces. The war-cries raised by the army rent the skies.

Many evil omens were seen. Asses neighed, the horses yoked to the chariots stumbled even on soft and level ground, rains descended, a red circle appeared round the sun, vultures perched themselves on the flags of Khara; meteors were seen; and Khara's left shoulder trembled. But undaunted, Khara advanced uttering words of bravado, imagining that two tiny men could be no equal to him who had even fought with Indra, the king of the celestials. Rama directed Lakshmana to take Sita into the cave near by and keep guard there ready for any emergency and said that he would meet the rakshasas. After Lakshmana and Sita went into the cave, Rama put on his armour, took up his bow and arrows and faced the enemy hordes with unflinching courage. How could one man fight with thousands of rakshasas was the question asked on every side. The anger which Rama summoned up made him look like the God Rudra and he blazed like a world-devouring fire. There was a terrible combat Although unequal in strength numerically, Rama's superiority in skill and prowess was definitely established at every turn. His arrows darted from his bow with amazing and mystifying rapidity. They sped in all directions and left no rakshasa untouched. Hundreds of rakshasas were slain. Dushana, the commander-in-chief, and other leaders like Trisiras also fell. The few rakshasas that remained fled in consternation as deer at the sight of a tiger. Even the brave and heroic Khara was for a moment dismayed, but he was not the man to flinch from an encounter. He attacked Rama. Rama's armour was shattered and his bow was broken. Within the twinkling of an eye he took up another bow and directed many arrows against Khara and returned the attack in double measure. Khara's flag fell; his chariot, charioteer and horses were destroyed; his bows and arrows were split into pieces; and he was covered in blood. The rakshasa,

however, took up his mace and gave fight, standing on the ground. Rama addressed him thus: "You have been guilty of so many wicked acts that you are hated like a poisonous serpent by all. You must now reap the fruits of your actions. Let the holy rishis now see with their own eyes what fate is going to befall you. Your head is going to tumble down like a palmyra fruit from the tree top." Khara was sarcastic in his reply. "You estimate yourself to be a mighty warrior because you killed some ordinary rakshasas. Those who are truly strong never boast of their strength It is only when a man's end is near that he indulges in self-praise. Your bravado proves your inferiority. Let us fight out before the sun sets". So saying, he hurled his mighty mace with terrific force against Rama, but the latter broke it into pieces with his powerful arrows. Hot words were exchanged between them once again. A huge tree thrown at Rama with tremendous velocity shared the same fate as the mace. Hundreds of arrows discharged by Rama caused Khara to be drenched in blood. Then taking an arrow given to him by Indra, Rama directed it against the rakshasa who dropped dead as it hit him in the chest The rishis and others, who had assembled there, were overcome with joy at the destruction of the demon. The celestials who were delighted at this extraordinary feat showered flowers on Rama. Lakshmana and Sita came out of the cave; and Sita, overcome with joy, embraced her husband again and again.

Akampana, one of the few who had survived the battle, repaired in haste to the king of Lanka and communicated to him the news of the complete extinction of the military outpost at Janasthana and the killing of Khara, Trisiras and Dushana by Rama. He spoke of the unparalleled skill and strength and beauty of Rama and said that the arrows which issued from his bow were like hydra-headed serpents. Rama could, if he wished, bring down even the heavens. It was impossible to conquer him except by deception. The

best way to reduce him to subjection would be to steal his beautiful wife Sita. Unable to bear the separation from her, he would then put an end to himself. Ravana favoured the proposal and went quickly to the ashrama of his friend and erstwhile minister Maricha, son of Tataka, and sought his counsel. Maricha, who had had a previous taste of Rama's valour, tried to dissuade Ravana from the enterprise. He pointed out that enmity with Rama was sure to end in the utter destruction of the rakshasa race. "Do not be foolish," he said, "save yourself before it is too late". This was Maricha's advice. Ravana accepted it at first and returned to Lanka. But he was not left in peace. His sister Surpanakha came and spoke to him about the catastrophe. She taunted Ravana with indifference and cowardice and even said that he was unfit to be a monarch and that all his past glory was only illusory. Unless a powerful enemy like Rama who had risen up on the horizon was conquered immediately, there was no prospect or future for Ravana and his race. She painted Rama and Lakshmana in glorious colours and spoke of their marvellous deeds. The only way of subjugating them was to abduct Sita by stratagem. Sita would make a splendid wife for Ravana.

Once again, Ravana went to Maricha's ashrama and begged him to help him in the abduction of Sita. It was the only way to punish the audacious Rama who had killed 14,000 rakshasas within the twinkling of an eye and who was responsible for the disfigurement of Surpanakha. His scheme for abduction was this. Maricha was to assume the form of a deer of golden hue with silvery spots and to play before the hermitage of Rama so as to attract Sita's attention. Sita was sure to ask her husband to capture the deer for her. Maricha was then to escape, forcing Rama to follow him, and Ravana was to take advantage of this interval and carry away Sita.

Maricha felt outraged at this proposal and tried his best to discourage Ravana from such a dangerous enter-

prise. He was frank and strong in his words. He said that it was easy to find in this world men who will give advice to one's liking, but that it was difficult to find both those who will give, and those who will listen to, disinterested but sound words of advice. Rama was the very embodiment of dharma and his strength was immeasurable. To attempt to take Sita away from him was as foolish as to attempt to take away the brilliance from the sun. "You are definitely putting yourself in peril," continued Maricha. "If you want to live longer in this world in the midst of your friends and relations and in the enjoyment of your kingdom, get back to Lanka without rousing Rama's wrath". He further narrated his own experience in Visvamitra's ashrama when Rama, as a mere boy, had displayed against him his unexcelled skill in archery. One arrow from him had sent Maricha flying towards the sea. "If without heeding my words," he went on, "you pick a quarrel with Rama, you are sure to meet with your doom. There is nothing more sinful than to covet the wives of others. You have wives in plenty. Be content with them and save your honour, prosperity, kingdom, and life. I see Rama before my eyes everywhere and I tremble with fear remembering what happened to me. Please do not venture on an enterprise so fraught with danger."

Ravana, however, was obdurate and did not pay heed to Maricha's words He said that he did not ask Maricha whether the course he proposed to adopt was good or bad. His word was a command, and if it was not obeyed he would put Maricha to death on the spot. If however, he would do as he wished, he would even give him half of his kingdom. Maricha lost his temper and spoke spirited words "With wicked kings, words of wise counsel from friends and ministers are as futile as seeds sown in barren soil. Dharma is the foundation of sovereignty and it has to be protected and observed at all costs. Kings who are a prey to their senses are unfit to be kings. Persons who are nearing their end will never listen to the advice of

friends. Your will bring ruin not only on yourself but on all the rakshasas". Maricha finally said that he was prepared to die at Rama's hands rather than be killed by his evil-minded master.

A chariot speedily took Ravana and Maricha to Rama's abode in the forest. Ravana stayed behind at some distance, while Maricha assumed the form of a golden deer and disported himself in front of the hermitage. The deer was lovely in appearance and frisked about from place to place with frolicsome playfulness. On seeing the animal so attractive in its colours, Sita was lost in wonder. She asked Rama and Lakshmana to look at it from close quarters. The shrewd Lakshmana guessed that it was Maricha in disguise; no real deer was ever known to have such a variegated jewel-like appearance. Sita however insisted on having the animal. Even Rama was captivated by the deer and told his brother Lakshmana that he would go and get it for Sita's sake. If it happened to be a rakshasa, as Lakshmana suspected, it would be easy to kill it. So saying, he left the cottage, asking Lakshmana to take every possible care of Sita during his absence. The deceptive deer was not to be easily caught. It ran in all possible directions luring Rama on, in an exhausting chase. Visible sometimes and invisible at others, at one moment very near and at another far distant, it mystified Rama. Tired of the pursuit, Rama sped his arrow against the animal and it dropped down dead. But before dying, it imitated Rama's voice and cried aloud, "Oh! Sita, Oh! Lakshmana" thus making it appear that it was Rama who was in distress. It was only then that the full significance of the rakshasa's deception dawned on Rama. He became frightened when he thought of his wife and his brother and of their probable reaction to the cry raised by Maricha; and he hastened to return to them.

When Sita heard the cries of Maricha, she shook with fear thinking that great harm had befallen her lord and she asked Lakshmana to go and see what was the matter.

But Lakshmana refused to comply with her wishes as his duty was to stay at the hermitage and protect her against evil and danger. Full of fear, and being naturally very much agitated in mind, she misunderstood Lakshmana's refusal to go, and she charged him with being an enemy to his brother and with entertaining evil designs towards herself. Lakshmana's assurance to the contrary had no effect upon her mind which was utterly confused and sorrow-stricken. Her accusations became more bitter and she said that she would rather commit suicide than pass into another person's protection. Lakshmana was stunned to the core by these cruel words. He fell at her feet, exclaiming that to him she was a goddess and that he did not deserve such cruel words from her. Iron entered his soul when he heard Sita speak thus; and he left the place in sheer disgust telling her that he would go in search of Rama who was ever invincible and on whom no harm could ever befall.

The departure of Lakshmana was Ravana's opportunity. He assumed the form of an ascetic, and, dressed in ochre-coloured robes, with a staff and a *kamandalu* in his hands, he entered the hermitage. Sita was sitting in a corner shedding tears. He recited the Vedas and then asked Sita who she was, why she was lonely and why she was weeping. The somewhat erotic language used by him escaped Sita's attention at first as she was immersed in grief. She thought that the ascetic before her was genuine. She fetched water for him to wash his feet and gave him a seat.

She then briefly told him her story and the circumstances under which Rama, Lakshmana and she had to leave Ayodhya and come to the forest. She said that in a few minutes the two princes would return and pay their respects to him. But while Sita was talking to him thus, the ascetic suddenly announced himself as Ravana, the lord of Lanka, the mention of whose very name made all the three worlds tremble in terror. He said that her charm and beauty had captivated his heart the moment he had seen

her and that he wanted her to be his queen of queens, reigning supreme in spacious palaces and spending her time joyously in the midst of pomp, luxury and comfort.

Sita, the daughter of Janaka, the model of chastity, was now beside herself with rage at this deception of evil-minded Ravana. Showing her utter disregard for the man, she proclaimed that she, the wedded wife of Rama, the pure, the truthful and the noble-hearted, a lion among men, would not even look at him who was a mere jackal by comparison. He could not even touch her as one could not touch the radiance of the sun. His doom was near at hand when he presumed to cast covetous eyes on her. His attempt to win her was as ridiculous and venturesome as that of a man who tries to pull the fangs from the mouth of a fierce serpent, or tries to live after drinking deadly poison, or tries to wipe his eyes with needles, or his tongue with a sharp-edged razor, or who tries to cross the ocean with a stone tied round his neck, or tries to catch the sun and the moon with his hands, or tries to extinguish a big flame by covering it with a cloth, or tries to walk over sharp points. She taunted Ravana and said that the difference between him and Rama was like that between a jackal and a lion, a channel and an ocean, wine and nectar, lead and gold, mire and sandal, a cat and an elephant, a crow and a garuda, a fowl and a peacock, or a duck and a swan. Exhausted by this outburst, Sita's frame trembled and shook. Ravana again enlarged upon his own greatness and proclaimed how he was the terror of mortals and celestials; and he pointed out that she could live a happy life of luxury and prosperity in Lanka, forgetting a weakling like Rama, who had shown his helplessness when he had tamely submitted to his father's words and assumed the hermit's robes. On hearing these outrageous words, Sita spurned him. Thereupon Ravana assumed his real terrific form and catching her by the hair with his left hand, he lifted her with his right. His chariot, which had till then remained invisible, appeared on the scene. He

threatened her with dire consequences if she protested and he drew her forcibly into the chariot. Sita wept bitterly at the fate that had overtaken her and cried aloud for help. But Rama and Lakshmana were far away. She cried out to all animate and inanimate creatures near by and asked them to tell Rama of what had befallen her at the hands of Ravana. Seeing Jatayu at a distance, she appealed to the bird to inform Rama of her forcible abduction.

Jatayu, on hearing Sita's cries, flew down from the tree on which he had been perching, and accosting Ravana as a vile creature who was stealing Sita in Rama's absence, commanded him to release her forthwith. Ravana did nothing of the kind and Jatayu began a fight which proved both hot and severe for the rakshasa. The bird broke Ravana's bow, destroyed his chariot and horses, and smashed down his white umbrella and its bearers. Ashamed of such indignities, Ravana summoned up all his strength and wounded Jatayu fatally, by severing his wings and feet with his sword Jatayu's life flickered to its end. Sita rushed to him and embraced him, lamenting over his condition. But Ravana snatched away Sita once again, and placing her in his chariot, flew away towards the south. On seeing all this, Brahma and the gods and the rishis, knowing that Ravana had sealed his fate by this wicked deed, exclaimed, "Our work is done".

As Sita was being carried aloft in the sky, her anklets fell down to the earth; so did her necklace and some other jewels that she wore. And a loud exclamation was heard in the air, "If Sita is carried away in this manner by Ravana, where is dharma, where is truth, where is rectitude? This act of Ravana's will bring upon him swift retribution".

Even during the flight, Sita taunted Ravana with his cowardice and wickedness in this carrying her away by stealth. Swift would be his punishment at the hands of Rama. But Ravana paid no heed to her anger or his own danger and he pursued his flight towards Lanka. Below

them as they flew, Sita saw five monkey chiefs on the top of a mountain. Unnoticed by the agitated Ravana, she dropped her silken shawl and some jewels in the hope that they might take them and inform Rama of her fate, should they by any chance meet him. Ravana at last reached the mountain citadel of Lanka and forcibly inducted Sita into the ladies apartment. He then despatched some rakshasas to Janasthana to bring news of Rama and Lakshmana and told them that they were always to be on the alert, planning ways and means to destroy the brothers. Blinded by an uncontrollable passion, Ravana later conducted Sita by force to see all grandeur of his palace, its spaciousness and artistic beauty. He led her along a flight of golden steps, showed her the silverframed windows and drew her attention to all the artificial lakes, ponds and gardens surrounding his palace. Again he plied her with his love-stricken importunities for her favours. He could not for the life of him understand why she was so devoted to an ordinary mortal like Rama who was forced by the command of his father to lead an ascetic life in the forest. He said that his head had never touched the feet of any other person, earthly or celestial but that it would touch her feet. "Favour my suit", he implored.

Addressed thus, the matchless Sita threw aside all fear, and placing a blade of grass between herself and him, she reprimanded him with piercing words of scorn. She declared that Ravana was not even fit to look at Rama, much less to fight with him Rama would burn him to ashes as Rudra had burnt Manmatha. Lanka would be ruined on account of the misdeeds of its king. People nearing their end did not know what they were doing. "You may bind me, kill me or eat me. Life is of no moment to me, but you shall not dare to touch me". Supplications failing, Ravana began to employ threats, and said that if within a period of twelve months from then, she did not relent and accept him, she would be cut into pieces and used for his breakfast. He ordered a large

group of rakshasis to surround the princess and take her to the Asoka garden where she was to be kept in solitary confinement. When she showed herself to be favourably disposed towards him, she was to be brought back. Ravana's order was obeyed and Sita soon found herself in the Asoka garden, like a solitary deer surrounded by a group of tigresses.

Meanwhile at Janasthana, as Rama was returning after kiling Maricha, he saw several inauspicious omens and became anxious for the welfare of his wife and his brother. He saw Lakshmana coming towards him at some distance, and exclaimed as his brother approached him, "What is it, Lakshmana, what have you done? You have left Sita behind, alone and unprotected. Is she safe? My mind is depressed. My left eye is throbbing. Shall we see her alive again?" Assailed with the distressing thought of Sita in danger, Rama plied Lakshmana with questions· where was she? Why had he left her behind, thus disobeying his commands? And did he consider it safe to leave her alone?

Lakshmana told Rama that when he refused to move out of the ashrama, Sita had become angry with him and uttered words which he could not bear to hear. He was unable to endure her reproaches and so had been forced to leave her presence in search of him. Rama was thoroughly dissatisfied with Lakshmana's reply and accused him of grave dereliction of duty. In his view, Lakshmana had no business to have forsaken her in this manner, knowing full well the dangers of the rakshasa-infested forest. He should not have heeded the invectives of the agitated and fear-stricken Sita. It seemed to him that Sita had been lost, almost.

The brothers now hurried to the ashrama. Rama trembled and his left eye twitched; and this was an evil omen. Sita was not to be found in the cottage. Rama began to weep and his mind became unhinged. He began to ask birds, animals, trees and stones,—whether they had seen

Sita and whether they knew what had become of her. He searched every nook and corner of the neighbourhood. His vision became dim and his gait unsteady. For one moment, he thought that Sita must be hiding and playing a practical joke on him. At another moment, he imagined her to be dead, devoured by the rakshasas with whom he was at war. What was he to say when he returned to Ayodhya without her? Would not people call him a coward, if he went back alone? Without his dearest Sita, the world would indeed be a bleak place, barren and empty. He felt that there was no other man destined to undergo so much suffering. With tragedy after tragedy, blow after blow, fate had indeed struck him down. He raved and addressed the Sun. "Every action and omission of the people in this world is known to you You are the supreme witness of the true and the false. Tell me, Lord, where is Sita?" Similarly, he sent up a prayer to Vayu, the wind-God. Lakshmana could not endure this mental affliction, this helplessness in Rama and he said: "Throw off this despondency, my brother, summon up your courage, let us search for Sita with diligence. Men of strong heart are never baffled by difficulties".

Rama then changed from his mood of dejection into a mood of anger and demanded of the hill near by whether it knew anything about his dear Sita. Imagining that it gave an affirmative answer, he asked it to reveal her. On finding that the hill made no response, he proclaimed that he would reduce it to ashes by the fire of his arrows. Just then his eyes fell upon some foot-prints on the ground. They were large, but their owner seemed to have been following someone who was of small stature and who faltered with fear. Then he sighted a broken bow, a quiver and a damaged car. He drew Lakshmana's attention to these traces. They proceeded further and found the dead bodies of a charioteer and two servants with musk *chowries* in their hands. Obviously a fight had taken place here. Sita must have been carried away or devoured. The

pursuit of virtue had not saved them from catastrophe. Rama cried out. "My very virtues have become my faults". But this mood changed after a short time. Addressing Lakshmana, he said that he would show the world what he was really capable of; he would bring down the very heavens, dry up the oceans and destroy the earth; the sun and the moon would no longer shine, if Sita were not instantly produced. Exclaiming thus, Rama drew himself up for the supreme effort necessary to end the world, and taking the bow from Lakshmana's hands, he fixed an unerring arrow to the string and looking like the all-devouring fire at the world's destruction he proclaimed: "Nothing can withstand me. Just as it is impossible to ward off old age, the march of time, or the play of destiny, so is it impossible to hinder my purpose."

Lakshmana begged Rama to subdue his anger against the whole world. "You who are famous for your kindness, mercy and benevolence towards all mankind should not fall a prey to such rage. One man's crime should not result in universal punishment. Let us make a diligent search of the seas, the forests and the mountains and discover Sita's captor; should the search prove unsuccessful, there will be time enough then to think of a further course of action". So observed Lakshmana and he fell at Rama's feet and begged him to be calm and peaceful. He reminded him that there was no mortal in the world who did not encounter some dangers, difficulties and sorrows; and if Rama of all men was unable to endure them, who else in the world could be expected to do so? Lakshmana concluded by saying that he was only reminding Rama, not teaching him.

Rama took Lakshmana's advice and they began their search for Sita. Soon after setting out, they came upon the prostrate Jatayu. Rama rashly jumped to the conclusion that the bird, who was probably a rakshasa in disguise, had killed Sita. He was about to hurl himself upon the dying bird, when Jatayu who was vomiting foamy

blood, was just able to tell him in his last gasp that Sita had been taken away by Ravana and that he himself had been worsted in an encounter with the rakshasa. On hearing this, Rama's distress became even more intense. He lifted Jatayu and embraced him and gave vent to his grief in these words. "Is there any one in this world more unfortunate than I am? I have lost a kingdom, lived a life of beggary in the forest, lost my wife and seen the death of a valued friend—such a succession of misfortunes must consume even the inconsumable fire".

Before his death, Jatayu pointed to the south indicating the direction in which Ravana had flown taking Sita with him The bird breathed its last and the brothers cremated the dead body. Rama blessed Jatayu in these memorable words: "I bid you farewell. Let your future be that of those who perform sacrifices, who worship fire, who make gifts of land and who never retreat in battle. May you go to the best of worlds".

During their further search for Sita through the dark and dense forest, Rama and Lakshmana came across a rakshasa called Kabandha with a body of huge proportions, with no head or neck, and with his mouth in his abdomen. The monster ran towards them with outstretched arms and caught them in his grasp. Lakshmana was frightened, but Rama did not lose courage. Just as Kabandha was boasting that fortune had favoured him in sending them for his meal, Rama and Lakshmana severed his arms with their swords and he fell on the ground with a loud roar. He now asked them who they were and on learning of their identity Kabandha realized that the curse laid upon him by a sage had come to an end and that he was about to assume his real form. He was grateful to the brothers for what they had done. Rama asked him if he knew anything about Sita He said that he knew nothing at the time but that he could, after assuming his true form, at least tell them of someone who might know her whereabouts After Kabandha had been placed on the funeral pyre and the

fire had been lit, he issued from the flames in a radiant form seated in a chariot. He advised the brothers to seek the help and friendship of one Sugriva and his four companions, who were living on a hill called Rishyamuka on the banks of Pampa. They were sure to help Rama and Lakshmana in their search. He then indicated to them the path they should take to reach lake Pampa, close to which stood the holy ashrama of Matanga where the celebrated Sabari was living. Near this ashrama in a mountain cave, lived Sugriva attended by four steadfast friends.

Rama and Lakshmana proceeded on their way and at last reached the ashrama of Matanga where they were received with delight by the woman-hermit Sabari whose devotion to the late sage Matanga was acclaimed with universal praise. When the sage and his disciples departed from this world she wished to accompany them but she was told that her time had not yet come and that she was to remain in the hermitage to offer hospitality to Rama when he came there in the course of his forest wanderings. The royal brothers partook heartily of the frugal fare of fruits and roots which Sabari had specially collected for them. Telling them that her heart's desire had at last been fulfilled, she received Rama's blessings and offered up her body to the fire which she had already lit and emerged from it, clad in splendid garments with a garland round her neck and adorned with bright ornaments. She then disappeared from their view. The brothers were charmed with the Pampa lake, with its setting, its limpid waters, with the flowers and the blossoms which grew on the trees and the soft-cool breeze which played over it all. Rama then asked Lakshmana to search for Sugriva without further delay, as life was becoming insupportable for even a day more without his beloved Sita.

CHAPTER IV

KISHKINDHA KANDA

THE entrancing beauty of Pampa roused in Rama reminiscences of the pleasant time he had had with Sita in the forest. The onset of spring with the blossoming of flowers, the cuckoo's call and the dancing of peacocks made the separation from her unbearable. In him, all zest for life was lost. Lakshmana might return to Ayodhya, but so far as he was concerned he could live no longer, said he Lakshmana offered consolation to his brother who grieved thus, and asked him not to lose heart but to take courage and continue the search. The two sorrowing brothers accordingly continued on their way.

Sugriva's Fears

Sugriva, the exiled vanara prince, observed Rama and Lakshmana coming from a distance and trembled in fear, suspecting them to be the emissaries of Vali. He confided his suspicions to his four ministers and all of them leapt from hill-top to hill-top in order to ascertain the danger, and be prepared to meet it Hanuman, one of the four ministers, told the frightened Sugriva that he need fear no harm from Vali who was nowhere to be seen in the neighbourhood and who could not enter the limits of the Matanga ashrama on account of a curse. Sugriva was not satisfied with this assurance from Hanuman, for he still thought that the advancing men might be his brother's spies. He therefore asked Hanuman to go to them in all humility and find out who they were and why they were wandering in the forest. Hanuman was not to be satisfied with what they said. He was to observe their facial expressions and their reactions to his words and find out if they were genuine travellers, or in fact, Vali's henchmen in disguise.

Hanuman's Meeting with the Brothers

The valiant Hanuman jumped down from the crest of Rishyamuka to the vicinity of the brothers. Assuming a beggar's form, he approached them in all humility, prostrated himself at their feet, and addressed them thus in soft and dulcet tones. "May I know, Sirs, who you are? Your faces are shining and beautiful. You would appear to be celestials moving about in the form of self-disciplined ascetics. Your beauty is transcendent and your prowess evident. You are fit to be kings. Why do you roam in these forests in ascetic robes and with matted hair? Your long bows, sharp arrows, and keen swords suggest beyond doubt that you can protect the whole world". Hanuman then told them who he was. He was a minister of Sugriva who had sent him to them on a good-will mission. Rama listened to him and drew Lakshmana's attention to Hanuman's faultless speech, to its substance and his articulation. Was it not brief and clear, the delivery neither too quick nor too slow, the voice musical, and the composition faultless? People who had such ministers or messengers were sure to achieve their objects. The two brothers were delighted beyond measure at this meeting; and Lakshmana told Hanuman that they themselves were in search of Sugriva.

Hanuman ascertained from Lakshmana that they were the sons of Dasaratha and that they had come to the forest to enable their father to fulfil a promise that he had made to his queen, and that in the forest Rama's wife had been abducted by a rakshasa whose whereabouts they did not know. They had been advised by Kabandha that they should seek the help of Sugriva. It was fortunate that while they themselves were going to Sugriva, his minister Hanuman should have been sent to them. They were greatly in need of Sugriva's help. Hanuman thereupon told them that Sugriva would be delighted to meet them and befriend them as he himself was a refugee from his kingdom, having been driven out by his elder brother Vali,

who had appropriated even his wife. Rama and Lakshmana expressed their readiness to go and meet Sugriva, and Hanuman carried them on his shoulders into the presence of his master.

The Alliance

Hanuman told Sugriva the story of the brothers, how they had come in search of him, needing his help in their quest for Sita. Sugriva was very pleased to hear this and extended his hand to Rama in token of his friendship. In the presence of a fire that had been specially kindled, they entered into a solemn treaty of offence and defence, each promising to share the other's sorrows and joys. Rama undertook to destroy Vali; and Sugriva promised in turn to search for Sita and help Rama to recover her. Sugriva remembered that he had seen Sita being carried away in the sky by Ravana and that on seeing them below, she had let some of her jewels fall. He produced them Rama was filled with grievous sorrow on seeing them and fell down unconscious Recovering his senses, Rama asked Lakshmana if these were not Sita's jewels. Lakshmana answered: "I know neither her armlets nor her ear-rings; her anklets alone do I know, because I used to see them during my daily prostrations at her feet". Sugriva assuaged Rama's grief by comparing his own fate with Rama's and asking him not to lose courage. He pointed out that defeatism and despondency were of no use; and that the search for Sita was the urgent task before them to which all their energies should be bent.

Sugriva's Story

Sugriva had no doubts whatever about Rama's help in vanquishing Vali. True friendship subsists not only in prosperity but also in adversity; poverty and riches are all one to true friends. The readiness to sacrifice bodily comforts, wealth and even life itself is the real test of friendship. Sugriva narrated his tale of woe to Rama and

implored him to help him against Vali who had not only banished him from his kingdom but had also taken his wife. So terribly afraid was he of his brother Vali that he had been forced to eke out a precarious existence in that part of the forest which was attached to Matanga's hermitage. Thereupon Rama asked him the cause of the misunderstanding or enmity between the brothers and Sugriva began to tell his tale. There was a long-standing feud between Vali and Mayavi, son of Dundubhi, on account of a woman; Mayavi came to the gates of Kishkindha and summoned Vali to fight. Vali came out with Sugriva. On seeing both of them, Mayavi retreated into a cave and hid himself. But Vali pursued his enemy into the cave, instructing Sugriva to station himself at the entrance. A year elapsed, but Vali did not return. Sugriva saw a stream of blood and foam issuing from the cave and also heard sounds of a rakshasa dancing exultantly inside. Honestly believing Vali to be dead and himself in danger, he closed the mouth of the cave with a huge boulder and returned to Kishkindha. The ministers and the people listened to his story and proclaimed him king. But, shortly afterwards, Vali came back and waxed furious with his brother for having deserted him and for allowing himself to be crowned. He paid no heed to Sugriva's words affirming his honest intentions and banished him from the kingdom forthwith, and annexed Sugriva's wife Ruma into his own harem.

Vali's Might

Sugriva had since then lived in utter dread of his brother Vali, who was one of the strongest beings in the world. Once upon a time, Dundubhi, a rakshasa in the form of a buffalo, finding no outlet for his strength and fighting propensities, although he had challenged many in battle, was finally referred to Vali as his equal in combat. Vali gave him battle, killed Dundubhi and flung his huge corpse to a great distance. As he did so, drops of blood

from the dead body fell in the ashrama of the sage Matanga. The sage became wild with rage at this desecration of his holy abode and placed a curse upon Vali that he should die if at any time thereafter he entered within the precincts of his ashrama. Hence Sugriva took refuge in the ashrama which Vali could not enter. In verification of the story and also to test Rama's strength, Sugriva showed him the skeleton of Dundubhi. Rama pushed it with the toe of his foot and sent it miles away. Finding that Sugriva was quite convinced by this feat of strength, Rama showed him his skill in archery by bringing down with one arrow seven huge *sala* trees standing at some distance from one another and by no means in a line.

Combat between Vali and Sugriva

Satisfied that he now had a powerful friend in Rama, Sugriva went to Kishkindha and called out Vali for a trial of strength. Vali accepted the challenge. A long and severe duel was fought by the two vanara brothers, which Rama and Lakshmana watched from a distance. Sugriva got the worst of the fight and was soundly beaten by Vali. He fled from the scene and taxed Rama with failing to help him at the crucial moment. Rama gave this reason for his non-intervention. The vanara brothers looked so much alike in appearance, strength and bodily proportions that he was unable to distinguish one from the other and an arrow from him might have killed Sugriva instead of Vali. It was arranged therefore that at the next encounter Sugriva was to wear a garland of big flowers round his neck for identification and that Rama would then let fly the fatal arrow against Vali. Sugriva, accompanied by Rama and Lakshmana, ventured to go a second time to Kishkindha. Vali accepted Sugriva's call for second fight, but was restrained for a short time by his wife Tara who had received information from spies and other sources that the powerful help of Dasaratha's sons was available to Sugriva. Tara advised her husband that it was impru-

dent and unwise of him to try his strength against Rama who was strong and skilful and never deviated from the path of dharma. Vali would do well to patch up his differences with Sugriva. But Vali was stubborn and paid no heed to her words. He came out of the palace and engaged in a duel with his brother and when Sugriva began to weaken in the combat, Rama shot his arrow at Vali; and it pierced his chest and overthrew him.

Vali's Remonstrance

When the valiant Vali was thus overthrown and lay prostrate, there was general gloom in the sky and on the earth. His valour and dazzling brilliance did not depart from him and his life did not become extinct by reason of a celestial garland which God Indra had given him and which he always wore. When Rama came near him to have one last look at the renowned hero, Vali censured him severely for the impropriety of his action. Rama had no quarrel with him and, according to Vali, Rama was a veritable coward, for instead of facing him squarely in battle, he had struck him from a place of hiding. "Was this foul act done by you to secure Sugriva's help in getting back your lost wife? I could have rescued her from Ravana's grip within a moment," said Vali.

Rama answered this charge. The territory of Kishkindha belonged to the Ikshvaku line of kings and Bharata was its ruler. It was the duty of the king to punish the wicked. As the representative of Bharata in the forest region, that duty devolved on Rama. Vali's acts had not only been unmeritorious but sinful. He had been governed by lust and greed. The younger brother was regarded as a son to the elder and the appropriation by Vali of Sugriva's wife was a despicable act of incest for which he deserved the extreme penalty of the law. Rama had entered into a solemn treaty of friendship with Sugriva; and under this pact it was his duty to see that Sugriva got back his wife and his kingdom.

Vali's Death

Vali reconciled himself to this answer and begged Rama to take care of his wife Tara and his son Angada and to see that Sugriva treated them well. Rama assured him in kind words that he need have no concern on their account. Vali's wife Tara came out of the harem and lamented long and deep over the fate that had overtaken her lord. Though she knew that the harm which he had done to Sugriva would one day recoil on his head, she had not expected that retribution would be so swift and sure. She could not endure her widowhood and she was ready to jump into the fire and be reduced to ashes together with her husband. Hanuman tried to assuage her grief by pointing out the inevitability of fate and the uselessness of sorrow after the event. She was the queen of Kishkindha and her son must assume charge of the kingdom under her regency. It was time to crown him king; and in his prosperity, she might forget her grief. Tara said in reply that Vali was dearer to her than a hundred Angadas; she did not care for the kingdom or for Angada's coronation. Sugriva must be the ruler of Kishkindha. Vali in his last moments begged forgiveness of Sugriva and in bidding him farewell once again entreated him to protect Tara and Angada who would be as faithfully devoted to him as to himself. He offered final words of advice to Angada and breathed his last. Angada and his mother prostrated themselves before Vali's body. Tara could not control her grief and begged Rama to kill her too, so that she might remain for ever with Vali. Rama consoled Tara in words of extreme sweetness and kindness. The wife of a hero must never bemoan her husband's death in battle; destiny could never be surmounted; life was a succession of joys and sorrows. Rama's words had some consoling effect on Tara.

Even Rama was grief-stricken at Vali's end, but he soon remembered that indulgence in sorrow by friends and relations could never help departed souls. Restraint and

control were necessary, especially when it was impossible to reverse what had happened. Time marched on irretrievably and all things had an end. Valour, prowess and relationship were ignored by the march of time; the ultimate causes of events were beyond men's control.

Meanwhile, Lakshmana directed the preparations necessary for the cremation of Vali. A well-decorated palanquin was brought and Vali's body was placed in it and was carried by a host of vanaras with full military honours to the place where the funeral pyre was spread. The body was placed on the pyre and the fire was lit by Angada. The sandalwood faggots quickly burst into flames and Vali's body was reduced to ashes.

Sugriva's Coronation

With due ceremonial and amidst pomp and splendour, Sugriva was then crowned king of Kishkindha. Angada was duly proclaimed as Yuvaraj. It was decided that during the ensuing rainy season of four months, Rama and Lakshmana should stay on the Malyavan hill and that when the rains stopped, the search for Sita was to begin. The brothers spent their days on the hill in anguish and sorrow The separation from Sita was unendurable and Rama spent joyless days and sleepless nights. Lakshmana's words of hope and encouragement were of no avail in rousing him from the depths of his misery. Dark and heavy clouds, thunder, lightning and rain, swollen rivers and roaring cataracts, which drove all wild animals to their lairs, marked the onset of the rainy season, whose end the brothers eagerly awaited.

Sugriva on the other hand, was immersed in royal pleasure and spent most of his time in the harem, having entrusted the reins of government to his ministers and bestowing no thought on what he had promised to do for the brothers. As the rainy season was drawing to a close, the wise Anjaneya reminded his master of his royal duties and of his promise to the princes who had helped him to

regain his kingdom. He said that it was high time that Sugriva fulfilled his pledge by starting to search for Sita. Gratitude was a great virtue and the friendship of Rama was priceless. To overstep the time limit would be a sin and spell disaster. Sugriva was pleased with this timely reminder and commanded Nila to gather together a large search party of valiant vanaras who were to go in all directions to find out the whereabouts of Rama's queen.

Lakshmana's Wrath

The approach of autumn was heralded by a clear sky, bright moonlight, slow-moving white clouds, fragrant flowers and dancing peacocks. Rama was upset at Sugriva's indifference and drew Lakshmana's attention to it. As Sugriva seemed to have become addicted to wine and women, Lakshmana was to go and tell him that if he did not bestir himself, he would have to tread the way of Vali. Lakshmana's fury at Sugriva's conduct knew no bounds, but Rama pacified him and pointed out that they could not do without his help. The time and circumstances dictated a policy of appeasement and persuasion and not one of anger. Rama advised Lakshmana to be firm but soft in his interview with Sugriva. Even after this caution, Lakshmana's face betrayed signs of excitement and fierceness. As he entered the gates of Kishkindha, the sentinel army was afraid of him, because he looked as though he would burn up everything that he saw. At the outer gate, he met Angada and bade him announce his arrival at once to Sugriva. On hearing the news that Lakshmana stood at his gate in a highly agitated and angry frame of mind, Sugriva lost his nerve. A small group of ministers came to him and warned him of the impending trouble. Lakshmana was there to burn down all the vanaras with his wrath and the only course open to them was to fall at his feet and beg forgiveness. Sugriva said that he did not see where his fault lay or why Lakshmana was so furious. But Hanuman boldly told him the truth, that he had

become immersed in a life of luxury and that Rama felt that he had not kept his word about searching for Sita. Rama was justified in thinking that Sugriva had forgotten his obligations and there was no point in Sugriva getting vexed. To beg pardon of the brothers was the only course open

Meanwhile Lakshmana had made his way into the palace. He was quickly announced and he walked in. The entire group of vanaras who were there stood up with folded hands in salutation. Lakshmana saw the pomp and paraphernalia which surrounded Sugriva and the sensual comforts he had been enjoying since his coronation. He observed on every side golden cots, rich and soft mattresses and bed-spreads, and dancing girls bedecked with garlands and jewels, in various poses and postures. On witnessing the scene, Lakshmana blushed, but he soon recovered and a single twang of his bow roused Sugriva from his inebriate condition. The vanara chief shrank in terror and begged Tara to intervene saying that a woman's appeal for mercy would have the desired effect on the angry Lakshmana. Thereupon Tara with all her blandishments approached Lakshmana with modesty and stood in front of him with an imploring look. She begged for pity and reminded Lakshmana that he should not judge common people by his own standards of ascetic purity and that when even great sages fell victims to women's charms, it was not surprising that Sugriva, who had suddenly come into possession of a great kingdom, should have fallen a victim to the pleasures of the senses. How was it possible, she said, for a vanara with an unsteady mind to behave in any other manner? It behoved Lakshmana to forgive Sugriva.

On hearing Tara, Lakshmana controlled his anger and when she had taken him into Sugriva's presence, he spoke to the vanara king in tones of conciliation. Nevertheless he found fault with him for his neglect and threatened him with ruin if he continued to be indifferent to his obli-

gations. Once again Tara had to intervene with her sweet persuasiveness. Sugriva was a good man, a sincere friend and was full of gratitude for the help given to him. Having lived a life of abject misery, he had, on being lifted out of it, become addicted to the enjoyment of pleasures. Even Visvamitra had not been mindful of his *tapas* when he fell a victim to Menaka's charms. Men like Lakshmana, filled with strength of mind and physical prowess, should not fall a prey to anger. It was the sign of greatness to forgive and forget the faults of others. Sugriva would forsake his wealth, his kingdom, nay even his wife, for the sake of Rama and it was certain that he would help him to get Sita back from Ravana who was a most powerful enemy—so Vali had told her. Sugriva, as a matter of fact, had already given the command summoning the vanaras from all quarters to go in search of Sita and he was only awaiting their arrival before taking action.

Lakshmana, who was really soft and merciful by nature, was appeased by Tara's words. Sugriva then told him that he would not be so base as to forget that he owed everything to Rama and Lakshmana and that he was not unmindful of his duties towards them. If he was guilty of any faults or omissions, he begged to be excused. There was no man who did not commit a mistake at some time or other. Lakshmana was pleased with this subdued speech from Sugriva and he in his turn asked Sugriva's forgiveness for anything offensive he had said in passion or in anger.

Search Parties

At the end of this interview, Sugriva ordered Hanuman to organise quickly a search party and issue the necessary directions. In obedience to his orders, a huge army of vanaras was soon collected at Kishkindha. Meanwhile Sugriva came to Rama's abode on the Malyavan hill-top and made due obeisance before him, prostrating himself at his feet. Rama embraced him, offered him a seat and gave

him a few words of advice. He said that the three paths of dharma, artha and kama were each to be pursued at their proper time. He who trod on the path of kama to the prejudice of dharma and artha was sure to fall like a man who slept on the top of a tree. The season during which the enemies were to be subjugated and friends gathered had already advanced. Sugriva made a suitable reply and pledged his assistance once again. Rama was pleased with Sugriva's sincerity and said that he felt no doubt that with his help, he would conquer his enemy Ravana. As they were speaking thus, huge clouds of dust sprang up in the skies of the distant horizon and the very earth seemed to shake. Regiment after regiment of vanara warriors, led by far-famed generals, like Satabali, Sushena, Kesari, Gavaksha, Panasa, Nila, Angada and Hanuman marched up to the place where they sat; and the whole neighbourhood became studded with vanara soldiers

Orders were soon given. One contingent was despatched east under the leadership of Vinata to search for Sita with full instructions to look into every nook and corner. The southern party was placed in charge of Angada with experienced generals like Nila, Hanuman, Jambavan, Mainda and Dvivida to help him. Sushena led the western search party. Satabali was at the head of the northern party. One month's time was given to the four parties for their search and return. Sugriva knew intuitively that success would attend the southern party and that Hanuman would be the chief instrument. He therefore gave special instructions to him and told him that he reposed the greatest confidence in his strength, valour, foresight, discrimination, determination of purpose and wisdom His tact and his adaptability were beyond praise. He could achieve even the impossible, if he only made up his mind. Rama, in view of his own prepossession in favour of Hanuman and the special confidence that Sugriva reposed in him, gave him his signet ring so that he might show it to Sita in proof of his being Rama's messenger, should he

happen to discover her. Hanuman placed the ring reverently on his own head and prostrated at Rama's feet.

The Search

The four divisions lost no time in setting off in their different directions. Rama, observing the detailed instructions given by Sugriva to the various search parties, asked him how he knew so much of the geography of the world. Sugriva told him that in his flight from Vali he had travelled from place to place and thus came to know about all the countries of the world and how they were to be reached. After some days spent in anxious waiting, the northern, eastern and western contingents returned, unsuccessful in their mission. The southern party was the only one that tarried. Angada and his group searched several places and became exhausted with hunger and thirst. Seeing the mouth of a cave in the southern flank of the Vindhya mountain, they approached it and observed birds coming out drenched with water. A delightful fragrance reached them. Thinking that they might at least quench their thirst, they entered the cave and proceeded some distance. The passage was enveloped in utter darkness, but undaunted, they groped their way onward. Finally, they emerged out of the darkness into the light and saw a lovely garden, in which were lakes and lotuses and beautiful palaces.

Svayamprabha

The whole atmosphere was pervaded with the fragrance of incense and at some distance they saw a lady of dazzling beauty, robed in forest bark and antelope skin. She was obviously an ascetic whose radiance was due to her spiritual attainments. After telling her that he and his companions had entered the cave in search of food and water, Hanuman ventured to ask her who she was and what was the origin of the surroundings in which she stayed. The old lady told him that she was Svayamprabha,

friend and companion of Hema, a celestial damsel, whom a danava king called Maya loved and adored. The pleasure garden and the palace belonged to them and it was by their grace that she was in charge of it. She offered Hanuman and his party some fruits to eat and showed them pools where they could slake their thirst. She then asked them who they were and what their mission was. Hanuman told her about the loss of Sita, the friendship between Rama and Sugriva, and the orders that he and his friends had received to search for Sita. In the course of their wanderings which had been so far unsuccessful, they had become overpowered by fatigue and when they had seen the cave with its promise of a plentiful water supply they had dared to enter it. Owing to her kindness, they were now relieved of hunger and thirst and he wanted to know what they could do in return for her. She said there was nothing which she desired. As the time fixed by Sugriva for their return had long since elapsed and they did not know how to get out of the cave, Hanuman requested her to help them out of it. Thereupon she asked them to close their eyes, and by her yogic powers, she transported them in a moment to the open country outside the cave. Having performed this miracle, she blessed them and went back into the cave, informing them that they were near the Vindhya mountain and that at some distance beyond lay the sea.

Angada's Distress

Angada now pointed out to his companions that, as they had not only exceeded the period allowed by Sugriva but also failed in their mission, it was almost certain that they would receive no welcome at his hands. Moreover it was possible that he would show them no mercy. Sugriva was not well-disposed towards him. But for Rama, he would not have been crowned Yuvaraj by Sugriva. It was far better for him to enter the fire forthwith than to return to the kingdom of Kishkindha and suffer capital

punishment at Sugriva's hands. Most of his companions seemed to agree with this advice not to return home.

Only Hanuman saw danger in this counsel of despair. He tried to persuade the vanaras that it was not the right course to adopt and warned Angada that he should not seek to affect their loyalty to their king and that tried generals like Jambavan, Nila and himself would not be deflected from their duty. Moreover, the policy proposed by him might arouse the wrath of Lakshmana which no one could withstand. Therefore they must continue their search and not abandon it. This remonstrance from Hanuman elicited a frank reply from Angada who said that he saw no virtue in Sugriva, a chief who lacked stability, strength, purity of mind, truthfulness of speech and righteous conduct, as well as courage and valour. One who would take his elder brother's wife into his own harem was base and despicable. It was impossible that Sugriva would treat him with affection or friendliness. Self-immolation in the fire appeared to him preferable to being beheaded by his cruel uncle. He said he had made up his mind to perish there, leaving his friends to go back, if they chose. The other vanaras who circled round him with the intention of following his example began to talk among themselves about the course of events which had led to the desperate situation which they were now in, and happened to mention the killing of Jatayu by Ravana.

Sampathi's Help

The bird Sampathi, elder brother of Jatayu, who was perching on a tree at some distance heard the name of his younger brother being mentioned by the vanaras. He could not fly to them as his wings had been scorched by the burning rays of the sun and so he asked them who they were and how Jatayu had come to lose his life Angada narrated to him the whole story. Sampathi now crept near and became eager to help them as they were engaged in rendering service to Rama who was the friend

of his younger brother. He was able to see long distances, as his vision was keen and extensive. He told them that he had earlier noticed a lady being carried away in the skies by Ravana and that she was weeping aloud, calling out the names of Rama and Lakshmana. Ravana lived in Lanka and Sita was being kept as a closely-guarded prisoner in his palace. They would most surely find her there. Then Sampathi gave a long account of himself and Jatayu. A sage, Nisakara by name, had told him that, when he helped in the task of discovering Sita, he would, by Rama's grace, recover his wings. A hundred years had elapsed since then and he was still waiting patiently for the opportunity to help Rama The occasion had now come and his wings were growing again, which was a sure sign that they would also succeed in their attempt to find Sita. Saying this, Sampathi flew away into the skies; and the vanaras became overjoyed at what they had heard.

The Seashore

The vanaras then continued on their journey to the south and reached the sea-shore, but they were nonplussed at this fresh obstacle in their way. The deep and wide sea had to be crossed. How were they to do it? Once again they were in despair. The sun set in the western sky and the night was spent in a mood of depression. When day broke, the vanaras came and sat round Angada and Hanuman and began to discuss ways and means of reaching Lanka. The chiefs proclaimed one after another the distances that they could jump. One could leap over ten yojanas, another twenty, yet another thirty and so on. When it came to Jambavan's turn, he said that in olden days he could no doubt have leaped over a hundred yojanas, but now on account of his age he could do no more than ninety. But this was not enough as the sea to be crossed was ten yojanas longer. Angada felt that he could do a hundred but was doubtful about the leap back. In any case Angada had to be ruled out as he was

their leader, their commander, their yuvaraj and should not be allowed to take risks.

All of them then thought of Hanuman who was sitting quietly at his ease at some distance from them. Jambavan roused him to make the great effort by reminding him of his unparalleled strength and valour. Was he not the son of Marut and had he not received at his birth the blessing that he should be as powerful as the wind? Was he not the one who, as a child, tormented by hunger, had thought of reaching the sun, which he took to be a fruit, and was it not thus that he was hurled down by Indra, and falling on a mountain, had broken one of his cheeks, wherefore he had been named Hanuman? Was it not to appease the anger of Marut at that time that all the gods gathered together and one after another conferred on Hanuman various boons? Now it behoved him to achieve this wonderful feat of leaping across the ocean to Lanka and there to search for Sita. This reminder of his prowess roused Hanuman to a sense of his own unparalleled strength. As a result, he grew in size and assumed a huge and powerful form. Prostrating himself at the feet of his friends, he said: "I shall fulfil your behest. No one can prevent my flight over the ocean. I am as strong as Garuda and Vayu. I shall see Sita and if necessary uproot Lanka itself and bring it here". At this exclamation from Hanuman, the vanaras became overpowered with joy. And Hanuman climbed to the top of the Mahendra mountain and prepared himself for the great leap.

CHAPTER V

SUNDARA KANDA

The Leap

FROM the Mahendra mountain, Hanuman took a mighty leap over the sea, bracing his body and concentrating his

mind on the stupendous effort. The hill shook to its very foundation when he used it as a spring board. Hanuman sped across the ocean like an arrow. However, he encountered obstacles on the way. Sagara, the deity presiding over the ocean, woke up the Mainaka mountain from the depths and asked it to serve for a short while as a resting place for Hanuman in his momentous mission. The summit of Mainaka rose above the waters. Hanuman hurled himself against it taking it to be a hurdle, but hearing that it was a friend come up to relieve his fatigue, he was pleased but did not tarry for even a single moment. To test his strength, the gods asked Surasa Devi, the mother of the Nagas hidden in the sea, to offer some obstruction She did so and opened her mouth widely as if to swallow Hanuman. But he contracted himself to small proportions, dived into her mouth and came out of it again before she had time to close her jaws. A short while thereafter, his speed began to drop and he looked down and saw the huge form of a rakshasi floating on the waters; she was capable of bringing down objects to herself merely by contact with their shadows. He jumped into her cave-like mouth, pulled out her entrails and then went on his way. Finally, he landed in a cocoanut grove on the northern shores of the island of Lanka, and from there, he saw at some distance the lofty towers of the citadel of Ravana. Grand palaces and lovely gardens came into view.

Hanuman observed that there were hosts of rakshasa guards everywhere: he therefore became despondent, thinking that such a well-garrisoned fortress might be difficult to penetrate. He reflected it would be rash on his part to enter Lanka there and then. Anything done at an inappropriate time or in a manner dissonant with surrounding circumstances would lead to failure. It would be better to hide his identity and wait till sunset. Thus reflecting, he became as small as a cat and decided to wait on the outskirts of the city till moonrise.

Lanka

When night fell, he went near the outer ramparts and for a while was lost in admiration of the grandeur, splendour and impregnability of Lankà. He was just about to steal through the gate, when a huge rakshasi appeared before him and prevented his entry. She told him that if he went a step further, his life would be in peril and she asked him who he was. Hanuman in reply asked her to tell him first who she was and he was told that she was the spirit of Lanka herself in rakshasi form and that her duty was to protect the city from the entry of strangers Hanuman prepared himself to fight, but meanwhile told her that he had come there out of curiosity to look at the great citadel of Lanka and its palaces, gardens and groves; and that after fulfilling his desire, he would go back. The demoness was roused to fury at this nonchalant reply and gave him a severe blow. Thereupon Hanuman struck her down with his left fist; having regard to her sex, he did not wish to inflict a more severe punishment on her. She pleaded for mercy and told him that long, long ago, she had been told by Lord Brahma himself that when she should sustain defeat at the hands of a vanara it would be a sign of impending disaster to the rakshasas of Lanka. The foretold time had apparently arrived and so he was free to go into the city and do whatever he pleased.

Thus vanquishing Lanka's guardian spirit, Hanuman jumped over the outer wall and placed his left foot first into the city, as if he planted it on the heads of his enemies. The city resounded with music. It was well illuminated. There were extensive palaces and lofty buildings on all sides. Here and there could be heard the recitation of mantras and Vedas. Some soldiers were challenging one another to friendly bouts. Sounds of the anklets and waist-belts of damsels could be heard in the streets. In the centre was a garrison of rakshasas. Some of them were ugly, some beautiful, some were dark and some

radiant. Right on the top of the hill was Ravana's palace surrounded by a huge rampart wall and also a moat covered with lotuses. In the environs of the palace, huge elephants and horses were moving hither and thither. Into this place, Hanuman effected a stealthy entry.

The Search

The moon rose high in the sky and bathed the palace in its cool rays. From time to time enchanting music reached Hanuman's ears. Some ladies were promenading with their husbands or lovers; some were engaged in conversation; and others were sleeping. All round was joy and revelry; but Hanuman could not see Sita anywhere and he became despondent. But soon, casting off his depression, he made a close search of Ravana's palace, the pomp and splendour which were beyond description. The search was however fruitless. Hanuman then jumped from place to place and searched the houses of all the important rakshasas living in Lanka. Sita was nowhere to be seen. He again came back to Ravana's residence and made a closer examination. He traversed all the bowers, lakes, waterfalls, groves, rest houses, retreats, and shelters. He saw a special apartment set apart for the *Pushpaka vimana*, the great chariot of Ravana. The vimana was ornamented with figures of tigers, horses, and elephants, and was studded with precious stones and coral; its wings were of gold. Hanuman was astonished at the sight of this aerial ship which could take Ravana wherever he wished to go with the swiftness of the mind. It was like a veritable light-house extending far up into the sky.

In the course of his further search, Hanuman came near the apartments attached to Ravana's bed-room. He saw hosts of young damsels who were drowsy or in a state of stupor, as a result of wine and revelry. Necklaces of gold and shining jewels were dangling carelessly from their bodies and they were lying in all kinds of postures and in various stages of undress. Some of them had fallen

to sleep embracing one another, some had their hands droopingly extended over the musical instruments that they had been playing. Goblets of wine were near at hand. Rich dishes of food, partly consumed, lay scattered everywhere. But Hanuman did not see the object of his search in this harem of beauties. He closely examined group after group and moved from one apartment to another. In one place, high above the rest, he saw Mandodari the chief queen of Ravana. She was of a golden hue, beautiful beyond description and bejewelled with pearls and precious stones. She lay on a cot in solitary splendour. For one moment Hanuman imagined that she was Sita herself. The irrepressible joy of discovery made him forget his surroundings. He danced and sang and strode all over the place; he scaled the pillars and jumped down from them and thus exhibited for a time his animal spirits.

But a little reflection made him realise his mistake. How could such a model of chastity as Sita sleep in comfort and in luxury when she had been forcibly separated from her lord? Deciding that it must be some other lady, Hanuman continued his hearch for Sita. Was it right on his part to enter into another's harem and see such things? Was this not a deviation from dharma? But he consoled himself with the thought that his mind was pure and was not in any way affected by what he saw. Where else could he search for her, except among groups of women?

The search proved barren and Hanuman again became depressed. What was he to tell his friends on the other side of the sea, anxiously awaiting his return? Was he to tell them of his failure and depress them too? He threw off this mood by reflecting that a cheerful optimism was the inspiriation of every action and the *sine qua non* of achievement. What was needed for success was an effort unhampered by despair. Pondering thus, Hanuman persisted in his search. But again another mood of defeat-

ism came upon him. To return without seeing Sita would mean disaster and ruin. Rama and Lakshmana would give up their lives, only to be followed by Sugriva and the rest. It would be far better for him to die there alone than to return without success. Was it for this that he had jumped over to Lanka? Was it all to end in utter disaster? It would be better to die than to be the cause of so much misery. Again, he saw that there was no point in self-destruction. "If one lives long enough, good days may come. So, I shall not kill myself but will continue to live here unobserved and unseen till I discover Sita."

The Discovery of Sita

While he was consoling himself thus, he happened to see the Asoka grove of Ravana at some distance. He had not searched it and it might be that Rama's queen was kept a prisoner there. With this thought, Hanuman jumped up and mentally worshipping Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva and all the gods, and fervently praying for success, he took one leap into the garden. The grove was an extensive one; lofty trees with gorgeous flowers were to be seen on all sides. Bowers and creepers, glass houses, hills and caves, both natural and man-made, waterfalls, small rivulets and channels, lotus ponds and big stone walls, cottages and hot-houses were all laid out in artistic designs. In the midst of this glorious sight, Hanuman saw a big Simsupa tree with an attractive pedestal round its base and entwined with creepers. He climbed up the tree, determined to wait there and watch, as it was very probable that Sita, who loved sylvan surroundings, might come there to offer her sandhya prayers at the lake.

As Hanuman expected, Sita issued out of a lofty mansion and directed her steps slowly in the direction of the Simsupa tree. She was surrounded by a guard of rakshasis. There was sorrow in her face and she was sighing heavily. She was like the moon at the commence-

ment of the bright fortnight or like a flame of fire encircled by smoke. She wore a single garment which was old and unwashed. Overwhelmed with sorrow and bearing on her person the marks of physical and mental suffering, with tears flowing from her eyes, she was lost in reverie. Around her was a hostile group of rakshasis like hounds surrounding a deer. Her long dark hair flowed down to her waist in matted confusion. She looked like faith destroyed or aspiration unfulfilled or fame sullied by scandal. Hanuman had no doubt that this was Sita. She was exactly like the lady whom he had seen being carried away by Ravana when they were on the top of the Rishyamuka hill. She had not on her person the jewels which she had thrown down in the course of her enforced flight. Her beauty rivalled that of Rama and she was in every way fit to be his queen.

Hanuman was deeply grieved at seeing her miserable condition If such a princess as this had to undergo such distress, destiny must indeed be insurmountable. Had not Vali, Kabandha and Viradha, and 14,000 rakshasas in Janasthana including Khara, Trisiras and Dushana been killed for her sake? The kingship of the three worlds was as nothing compared to Sita. Obviously it was only the hope of reunion with her dear lord that was keeping her body and soul together. She did not see the rakshasis round her, nor the trees, nor the flowers. She was thinking of Rama alone with single-hearted devotion.

The very sight of those rakshasis around Sita was hideous and revolting to Hanuman. The variety of their ugly forms was endless. What a pity that one so pure, so lovely, so charming and one, whose natural beauty shone even without ornament, should find herself in such a situation! Though Hanuman was cast down with sorrow, he was at the same time overjoyed at seeing the beloved queen of Rama. Tears of joy flowed down his cheeks. He stayed where he was, wondering what he should do next.

Ravana's Arrival

Meanwhile, a little before day break, Ravana rose from his bed and was seized with a passion for Sita. He came to the Asoka garden accompanied by his attendants, his queens, and all his retinue. Hanuman was able to observe everything from the top of the tree where he had concealed himself, having shrunk to a diminutive size. As soon as Sita noticed that Ravana was coming, she shrank within herself and began to weep. Fasting, sorrow, fear and meditation had wasted her body, but she was strong in spirit and she prayed for Ravana's humiliation and defeat. Ravana made a fresh appeal to her. What was the use, he said, of thinking of her husband, who was a lonely mendicant and a wanderer in the forest and who had given up his kingdom unable to assert himself? If on the other hand, she would yield to Ravana's wishes, every comfort, luxury, pomp and prosperity would be at her feet. She would be able to eat, drink and make herself merry. Immeasurable riches, nay the whole world, would be at her command. To think constantly of a bark-robed weakling, whose very existence was doubtful, served no purpose. Rama was not his equal in strength or prowess, in wealth or fame.

Sita's Scorn

Trembling with fear and with tears flowing from her eyes at the thought of her husband, Sita spoke in sorrowful tones. Placing a blade of grass between herself and Ravana, she rebuked him for his wicked overtures. She said: "My chastity is inviolable. You should safeguard the wives of others as you safeguard your own. If you lust after other women, ruin will overtake you. Are there no virtuous men in the city to give you advice? And if there are, why is their advice not listened to or taken? I cannot be tempted with your riches or sovereignty. Having married one who is the greatest among men, do you think I would care for anybody else? If you wish to save your-

self, your best course would be to return me to my husband, who is the sworn protector of those who seek his refuge, otherwise, you will surely tread the path of destruction, and not only you, but also your friends, relations, and all Lanka itself. You are a cowardly thief to have carried me off by treachery and force while Rama and Lakshmana were absent. You are like a dog who is unable to stand in the presence of the tiger."

At these words of scornful reproach, Ravana became furious But he slowly swallowed his anger as he still had some hopes of realising his desires He told her that he would give her but two months more, to change her mind and save herself. Should she persist in her present attitude after that period, she would be brought to his kitchen and cut into pieces for his breakfast. Even the rakshasis around her were afraid at these words and they consoled Sita by signs. But she did not lose courage and again she chastised him in stronger terms. Ravana thereupon gave instructions to the rakshasis nearby that they should so threaten and coerce Sita that she would be obliged to submit to his will. At this point, Dhanyamalini, the junior wife of Ravana, intervened and dissauded him from proceeding further, by embracing him and reminding him that when there were so many of them with whom he could share his pleasures, there was no need for him to think of a woman who did not return his love. For the time being, Ravana agreed and left the place with his retinue

Thereupon the chief among the rakshasis, who were guarding Sita, began to pester her and lecture her on Ravana's greatness and the great fortune which would await her if she only yielded to his importunities. Sita told them that even if they ate her up, she would not submit. She would never swerve from her devotion to Rama. Her husband, though he be poor, and without a kingdom, was her lord and master. When the attempts of their leader had failed, the rakshasis began to threaten her individually and said that they would eat up every part of her body.

But even this produced no effect on Sita who was adamant.

At the same time, she began to weep loudly and bitterly at the fate that had overtaken her. She trembled with fear and rolled on the ground exclaiming, "Oh! Rama, Oh! Lakshmana, Oh! Kausalya, Oh! Sumitra. Why does not death overtake me, for I am like an overladen boat tossed by strong winds and about to capsize in mid-sea? What sin have I committed in my previous births to deserve this suffering and sorrow?" For a while she raved like one mad, one whose mind was unhinged. She cried out: "Without Rama, I have no desire to live. But my iron heart will not break even in the midst of such terrible woe. I would not care to touch your Ravana even with my left foot. Why do you all talk endlessly and meaninglessly? You may kill me, burn me, but Ravana will never have me. It is my misfortune that Rama does not know where I am or what has become of me; otherwise would he not have come here forthwith and rescued me from this desperate situation? There is still time. Ravana and the rakshasas will be destroyed by my husband and every home in Lanka will be filled with grief and wailing." She stopped and thought within herself: "There is another possible alternative. Rama and Lakshmana may have been killed by the wicked rakshasas. If so, there is no hope for me and the best solution is to make an end of myself".

Trijata's Dream

The rakshasis began once again to assail Sita with *their threats. But an old one among them, named Trijata,* advised them to desist from teasing and threatening her any further and began to tell them about a significant dream that she had had. She dreamt that Rama and Lakshmana in resplendent white robes had arrived in a celestial chariot and had taken away Sita proceeding in the sky northwards. Moreover she had seen Ravana wearing a red cloth, intoxicated with drink, and wearing round

his neck a fateful garland of red flowers. He was laughing and dancing like a mad man and then sped away to the south in an ass-driven car. She had seen him again, falling head downwards and disappearing into a pit of filth. The goddess Kali with scarlet robes was dragging him towards the south She had seen Kumbhakarna, Ravana's brother, in a similar plight. Of all the rakshasas, Vibhishana alone had a white umbrella over him and a white garland round his neck His body was anointed with white sandal paste and he was seated on a huge elephant while conchs were blown and trumpets sounded. The city of Lanka was seen to be in flames, a vanara messenger from Rama having started the fire. This dream betokened the approach of good fortune to Sita and utter ruin to the rakshasas and their kingdom. They would do well to prostrate themselves at Sita's feet and seek her pardon. Janaka's daughter would be merciful to all those who asked her pardon.

Meanwhile, Sita was in the depths of despair. She recalled to herself the wonderful time she had spent in Ayodhya with Rama and remembered how it was her own foolish desire for the golden deer that had begun this sequence of disasters. It was all very well for Rama and Lakshmana. After finishing fourteen years in the forest in fulfilment of the vow, they would go back to Ayodhya and live there happily once again. But, so far as she was concerned, there was no more hope for her. All her penances, austerities and devotion were in vain; they had not come to her rescue in this hour of imminent peril. The only way to escape this misery was to hang herself from the tree with the aid of her matted hair. As she was preparing to take this step, she became aware of some auspicious signs. Her left eye began to throb, so did her left shoulder and her left thigh. These goods omens put a little cheer into her heart and made her pause.

Hanuman's Approach

Meanwhile, Hanuman who had witnessed all this from his seat on the tree, was amazed at Sita's scorn for Ravana and her unswerving devotion to Rama. He was at a loss as to which course of action he was to take under the circumstances. If he went back to Rama without talking to Sita he might be taken to task. If Rama asked him what she had said to him, he would have no answer. To go away without speaking to her would afford no encouragement to Sita who was now bent upon killing herself. If, on the other hand, he got down from the tree and approached her, she might take him to be some rakshasa or even Ravana himself in disguise; and her frightened cries might rouse a whole army against him, thus dooming to failure the mission on which he had come. Pondering over the situation in this manner for some time, he resolved to recite Rama's history and thus attract Sita's attention. He did so, telling the story right down to the despatch of search parties in all four directions and to his own flight over the ocean to Lanka to discover her whereabouts Sita heard all this and wondered where the words were coming from. She lifted her head to the Simsupa tree and noticed a vanara on the top. She was glad, but at the same time she was not pleased with the sight of the vanara shining like the sun through the branches. She thought she was dreaming, and to see a monkey in a dream was by no means auspicious. The story about Rama she had just heard was probably a product of her own diseased imagination. Anyway she wished that all she had heard were true .

Thinking this to be a good opportunity, Hanuman got down from the tree and approached Sita gently and softly. He prostrated himself before her and asked her who she was. Was she a celestial, a *yaksha* or a *kinnara?* Was she Sita, the queen of Rama, weeping at her separation from him? Sita was pleased at this friendly mention of Rama's name and she told the vanara who she was and how she

happened to be in Lanka, having been abducted by force by Ravana while Rama and Lakshmana were absent from the hermitage. Having said all this, she immediately regretted it. Was it not probable that the vanara before her was Ravana himself? Why did she speak with him? It was folly. She was plunged into sorrow once again, thinking all this to be a dream Hanuman tried to dispel her imaginary fears and assured her that he was indeed a messenger from Rama, that he was a minister of Sugriva, and that his name was Hanuman. To test his veracity, Sita put a number of questions about Rama to him and asked him to describe Rama's appearance and qualities. He gave a satisfactory reply and thus inspired confidence in Sita. He gave a detailed account of the momentous meeting between Rama and Sugriva and of the friendship forged between them. He also gave her an account of their wanderings in search of her and related how Sampathi had at last given them valuable information which had brought them to the seashore. He congratulated himself on his success in seeing her. He assured her that help was near at hand. She had only to wait for his return to Rama with news of her safety. Rama would lose no time in coming over to Lanka at the head of an army consisting of millions of vanaras and there was no doubt that he would rescue her after destroying Ravana. She had not long to wait for relief.

The Ring

To convince Sita still further, Hanuman gave her Rama's signet ring. Taking it in her hand, she was transported with joy; it was as if her husband had come to her. She praised Hanuman's daring, strength, prowess and wisdom She plied him with questions as to how the brothers spent their time and why they did not think of rushing to her help. Hanuman told her that they were plunged in grief and had spent a most miserable time, not knowing where she was nor how she could be rescued. Rama

ate no food and never slept. Times without number during his sleepless nights, he would rise from his bed and loudly call on the name of Sita. To such a plight was he reduced.

Talk between Hanuman and Sita

Sita listened to his account and blamed destiny for her misfortunes. She said it must be impossible to overcome destiny when even Rama and Lakshmana were subjected to such suffering Ravana had given her only two months to decide whether she would accept him or die. The rakshasa would never surrender her to Rama. She was unable to endure this suffering any longer. On hearing her piteous sighs, Hanuman asked her permission to carry her on his back that very moment and take her into Rama's presence. But Sita turned down this proposal, which she characterised as thoughtless and improper It was thoughtless because it would mean an immediate fight with the rakshasas who would pursue them in their flight, and one could not be sure of ultimate success in such a conflict. It was improper because she would never touch another man True, Ravana had seized her and brought her away, but that was by force; it was not voluntary on her part. Moreover, it was fit and proper that Rama should vanquish the enemy and take her back. That would redound to his credit.

Hanuman applauded her resolution as it was quite in keeping with the nature of a great lady. He said he would lose no time in returning to Rama and informing him of what he had seen and heard. She had only to be patient for a little while. Rama would soon be at the gates of Lanka and storm the citadel. Hanuman finally requested Sita to give him some token in proof of his having seen her and conversed with her. Sita thereupon told him the story of how a crow had attacked her in the forest while she and Rama were alone and he slept on her lap and how, when he awoke, he had discharged an arrow

which pursued the crow from end to end of the world and how ultimately the crow had come back to Rama for pardon and protection, which he readily granted. She also sent messages to the two brothers. Hanuman was specially to invoke Lakshmana's sympathy. Lakshmana was respectful to elders; he was bold; he was moderate in speech; he was like Dasaratha; he was dearer to Rama than she herself; with Lakshamana by his side, Rama forgot the death of his father; Lakshmana would carry out successfully any duty that was assigned to him; he must take pity on her and rescue her from her miserable state. She would somehow keep body and soul together for one month more but no longer. So saying she untied from her cloth her *chudamani* or crest-jewel and gave it into Hanuman's hands to be shown to Rama as a token. Hanuman went round her in reverent humility, fell at her feet, and received her blessings. He felt that though his body was there, he had reached Rama in mind already. Sita again implored Hanuman to bestir the brothers into quick action. She then expressed some doubt as to how Rama and the rest of the vanaras were going to cross the ocean. It was a feat of which Hanuman alone was capable. But Hanuman assured her that there were in Sugriva's court vanaras much stronger and more valiant than he. They could cross the ocean with ease; there were his equals but none inferior to himself. When even he could leap over the ocean, why should one doubt their capacity? The best men in an army were not sent out on missions; it was only the average men who were entrusted with duties of that sort. So she need have no apprehension on that score. Rama would arrive soon and Ravana's destruction was imminent. She need grieve no longer. Sita experienced a thrill of joy at these words. She became brighter and requested Hanuman to remind Rama of the playful way in which he, finding that there was no mark on her forehead, had placed one on her cheek when they were in the forest. Hanuman promised that he would recount to Rama

everything that she had said and bidding farewell to Sita, he assumed the gigantic size necessary for the leap back.

Hanuman's Resolve and Fight

Thereupon Hanuman reflected for a while in this manner. "I have seen Sita. But something more has to be done. Of the four methods of subjugation, that of peace is no good with wicked people like the rakshasas: being well-to-do, they cannot be bought over with gifts; the creation of dissensions or divisions is not possible with those who revel in their strength, the exhibition of valour alone remains. He alone is fit to be entrusted with the discharge of a particular mission, who, without prejudice to the main task, achieves several other allied things besides I must know something of the strength of the enemy before I fly back from here. I must not only give fight to the rakshasas but also see Ravana and assess his prowess as well as the workings of his mind".

Reflecting thus, he made up his mind to destroy the Asoka garden, feeling sure that he would thereby incur the wrath of Ravana and engage the army of the rakshasas in battle. Accordingly, by uprooting trees and destroying well-built tanks and lovely ponds and breaking hillocks, he desolated the garden. Bowers and art palaces were all smashed and the garden became woeful to look upon. Having thus accomplished the destruction, Hanuman ascended a lofty pillar in the vicinity and sat there with perfect composure awaiting the enemy hordes.

Meanwhile, all kinds of evil omens were seen by the rakshasas; and some of the rakshasis, who constituted the guard over Sita, were roused from their slumbers and saw a huge vanara before them. They asked Sita who he was, why he had come and what they had talked about. Sita replied: "You alone can know who he is and what he proposes to do. How can I know the real truth about the rakshasas? Has it not been said that a serpent alone knows the ways of a serpent? Probably, he is a rakshasa

come here in the form of a vanara; and I am as much afraid of him as you are." Some of them thereupon rushed up to Ravana and exclaimed "Lord, a huge monkey has come into the Asokavana and spoken to Sita. She will not tell us who it is. It has destroyed the entire garden except the place where Sita sits. Only the Simsupa tree to which she comes now and then has been left untouched. You must take urgent steps to punish the culprit." On hearing this, Ravana's eyes glowed with angry fire and he despatched forthwith a large band of rakshasas called Kinkaras to subdue and capture Hanuman.

They approached the Asoka garden, surrounded Hanuman, and struck him with their weapons. Undaunted, the vanara warrior lashed his tail on the ground with fury and raised the war cry "Victory to Rama, victory to Lakshmana, victory to Sugriva. I am the servant of Rama the unblemished. I am the son of Marut; a thousand Ravanas will not equal me in battle. I have fooled the rakshasas. I have seen Sita. I shall destroy Lanka and then only will I return". Terror seized the rakshasas, but still they gave him battle. Hanuman now took up a beam which rested on the pillar and employed it against his enemies with deadly effect Most of the Kinkaras were killed. The few that escaped death fled to Ravana and reported the disaster to him. Ravana thereupon sent Jambumali, the valorous son of minister Prahasta, to subjugate Hanuman.

By this time, Hanuman had razed to the ground the main palace and garden, and once again raising his familiar war cry, he assumed a gigantic shape and proclaimed at the top of his voice that thousands of vanaras, infinitely more powerful than he, were even then on their way to Lanka with Sugriva and that there would be nothing left of Lanka or Ravana. Jambumali, bedecked with shining ear-rings and wearing a red garland round his neck, approached Hanuman with his resounding bow. In the combat that ensued, Jambumali struck Hanuman with a liberal dis-

charge of sharp arrows and drew blood. Thereupon Hanuman approached a nearby *sala* tree and hurled it against the enemy, but it was broken to pieces by Jambumali. Once more he took up an iron beam from the pillar and dealt a fatal blow on the rakshasa's chest. The sad news of Jambumali's fall made Ravana still more angry and he despatched against Hanuman seven of the powerful sons of his ministers.

Resplendently dressed, they moved to their destiny in shining cars hung with festoons of golden hue and buntings and flags. All of them were experts in archery and they rained their arrows on Hanuman. But he killed them, some by blows with his fist, some with kicks and some he tore with his nails Some of the men dropped dead from fear on hearing his voice of thunder. The remnants of the force fled pell-mell and the city became loud with their cries of woeful distress.

Even Ravana shrank with fear at the news. He directed five of his commanders to march against the foe together with war elephants, infantry and cavalry. He warned them of the prowess of Hanuman who did not appear to him to be any ordinary vanara. Possibly he was some creation of Indra or of the Nagas, Yakshas, Gandharvas or Devas. They should not think lightly of him; apparently, he was even more powerful than many a vanara whose strength he had previously had occasion to appraise and appreciate. He had experience of vanaras like Vali, Sugriva, Jambavan, Nila and Dvivida, but they did not possess the valour of this vanara, nor his brilliance and skill in movement and manoeuvring, nor his determination of purpose. "He seems to be some dreadful creature in the form of a vanara. You have been victorious in many a fight; put forth your best efforts and conquer him". Encouraged by these words from their sovereign, the five commanders hastened to their doom and saw the big vanara seated on the pillar blazing like the sun. They surrounded him and began their attack. But Hanuman

proved more than their equal. He engaged the commanders in single combat and accounted for all of them, one after another Virupaksha, Yupaksha, Durdhara, Praghasa and Bhasakarna lay dead on the field. He then turned his attention to the remainder of the force and routed it. Once again he took up his vantage point on the top of the pillar, calmly awaiting further developments.

Battle with Aksha

When Ravana heard of the destruction of the five commanders, he looked significantly at his son Aksha. Guessing his meaning, Aksha jumped up in readiness for the fight, as the sacrificial fire flares up when oblations are offered with Vedic mantras. An eight-horse chariot decked with festoons and flags was brought for him and he went to meet Hanuman with a golden bow in his hand. Cavalry and an elephant body-guard accompanied him, not to mention a large army of soldiers. On approaching Hanuman, he was struck with wonder at the vanara's radiance and looked at him with respectful eyes. But the battle soon began with three arrows discharged by Aksha. The fight evoked the fears of the gods and the demons; the earth and the mountains trembled; the sun became dim; and the wind moved not. The arrows of Aksha rained on Hanuman unceasingly but Hanuman avoided them all. Aksha's prowess in battle delighted Hanuman and earned his admiration, but it was not desirable, he thought, to postpone any longer his counter-attack. A spreading fire was not to be treated with indifference He at once leapt on Aksha's chariot and killed the horses. Aksha abandoned the vehicle, took a sword in hand and jumped up into the sky to assault Hanuman. But Hanuman quickly took hold of his legs, and holding him face downwards and whirling him round and round, dashed him on the ground. Aksha broke and died instantaneously.

Encounter with Indrajit

Ravana next sent his second son Indrajit with careful

instructions. He warned him that, though he was unconquerable and had fought many a battle victoriously on previous occasions, he was not to think lightly of Hanuman who had proved himself to be one of the most formidable of foes. Indrajit took leave of his father and repaired to the scene of battle in a splendid chariot, fully equipped with arms. On hearing the sound of the approaching car and the twang of Indrajit's bow, Hanuman became more delighted than ever, anticipating a square fight with a worthy foeman. Many groups of spectators collected on the earth and in the sky to watch the combat between two such renowned warriors. Without delay Hanuman and Indrajit came to grips with each other. So dexterous were they in escaping each other's missiles, that Hanuman could find no loop-hole to attack in Indrajit and Indrajit could find no loophole in Hanuman either. Indrajit knew that Hanuman could not be killed; at best, he could only be captured. So he hurled at him the Brahmastra, which was never used in vain Hanuman knew that it was useless to counter this. Submission to its power was the only course open and so he became motionless and the astra bound him down tightly; meanwhile he thought of the boon that Brahma had conferred on him. Indrajit departed in order to convey the news to his father and Hanuman allowed himself to be bound again and again by the rakshasas so that he might be led into Ravana's presence. The rakshasas did not realise that the Brahmastra would never play a subordinate part As soon as they bound Hanuman with ropes, the Brahmastra let go its own hold. And as a result Hanuman could have shaken off the shackles, but as he was anxious to see Ravana, he pretended that he was still helpless He was then dragged into Ravana's presence by the rakshasa soldiers.

Into Ravana's Presence

Hanuman saw Ravana seated at the head of his ministers shining like a sun and displaying all the radiance

of his past glories "What a dazzling personality Ravana has! If only he did not pursue the path of unrighteousness, he would be fit not only to be the ruler of the three worlds, but also to take the place of Indra, the lord of the celestials". Thus thought Hanuman, lost in wonder at Ravana's striking appearance and enormous strength. Ravana was no less struck by Hanuman's form, his features and his radiance. He wondered whether it was the god Nandi himself, that cursed him in the mountain of Kailas, who had come in this form, or was he the famous Banasura of unexcelled martial glory? Ravana instructed his minister Prahasta to ask the vanara who he was, from where he had come and why he had entered the city, destroyed the Asoka grove and killed so many of his men. Prahasta, thinking that Hanuman was in terror, asked him to gather his wits and tell them the truth and assured him that there was no need for any fear on his part and that if he told the truth he would be released; otherwise, his life would be in peril. With an air of non-chalance, Hanuman answered: "I am not an emmissary of the gods, neither have I been sent by Vishnu. I am not in disguise; I am a vanara by birth. I destroyed the pleasure garden so that I might have a look at Ravana which was otherwise impossible. A number of rakshasas came and attacked me and I had to fight them in self-defence. No astra can bind me. Such is the boon which I received from Brahma himself. For the purpose of seeing Ravana, I submitted to the astra which has now lost its hold on me. I am Rama's messenger. I have something to tell you regarding your own welfare."

Admonition to Ravana

Then looking at the majestic Ravana, Hanuman addressed him fearlessly thus· "I have come here with a message from Sugriva. He seeks your welfare as a brother king. It is a message which will promote your *dharma* as well as your *artha* and which will be good for you in this

life and in the next world as well. In obedience to his father's orders, Rama came to live in the forest with his brother Lakshmana. His wife Sita, daughter of Janaka, king of the Videhas, was lost in Janasthana Searching for her, Rama happened to meet Sugriva who promised him to help. Sugriva also required Rama's help to win the vanara kingdom. Vali, whom you well know, was killed by Rama with one arrow and Sugriva has been installed as king in his place Thousands and thousands of vanaras have been sent by Sugriva in all directions over the globe to search for Sita I am one of them. My name is Hanuman. I am the son of Marut. Leaping over the ocean, I have come here and seen Sita in your mansion. You know what is meant by righteous conduct and you have so far reaped the fruits of your good deeds. It is your turn now to taste the bitter results of your wickedness One like you should not covet or seduce other men's wives Wise men are never tempted into sinful acts which are fraught with utter ruin to themselves. Who is there in the three worlds or even among the celestials who can stand before the arrows of Lakshmana following in the wake of Rama's anger? And who can be happy sinning against Rama? Pay heed to this advice which is for your good Return Sita to her husband. I have seen her here and the future lies in Rama's hands. You do not realise that in keeping Sita here, you are harbouring as it were a serpent in your bosom. Is it right for you to deprive yourself of the rewards of your austerities? You must preserve them. Your tapas was responsible for the boon of indestructibility at the hands of devas, yakshas and rakshasas. But Sugriva and Rama do not belong to the class of devas, yakshas or rakshasas One is a man and the other is a vanara How are you going to save yourself from them? Think of what is good for you, remember the slaughter in Janasthana, the destruction of Vali, and think of the pact between Rama and Sugriva. Why, I by myself can destroy the whole of Lanka with its ele-

phants and horses and chariots. But I have not been asked to do so. Rama has undertaken to uproot the wicked brood of rakshasas. Even Indra cannot stand in his way. And how can you? Please understand that she, who is now in your house and whom you take to be Sita, is no other than God's destructive *sakti*. She is no other than the noose of Yama round your neck. Do you not already see Lanka in flames, lit by Sita's spiritual force, and Rama's anger? Do not bring destruction on your friends, ministers, relations, brothers, sons and wives. Listen to these words of Rama's servant. Rama is capable of destroying the universe and recreating it again. There is none in the whole world who is his equal in battle. He has the courage, the daring and the strength of Vishnu himself. Having done him such terrible harm, you cannot save your life. Even gods like Brahma, Rudra and Indra cannot withstand his valour and what are you?''

Ravana's Anger

Hearing these stern and courageous words from Hanuman, Ravana's eyes became red with anger. He ordered that Hanuman should be put to death at once. But Vibhishana, the brother of Ravana, lodged a protest against this order. He stated that enlightened kings never ordered the killing of ambassadors. It was contrary to all political conventions and usage. It was inconsistent with Ravana's name and fame. There were other appropriate punishments prescribed, such as branding or mutilation of limbs. The beheading of a messenger was never heard of. Ravana should not surrender his proper judgment to a momentary impulse of anger. An ambassador spoke only the words of other people and not his own.

The Burning of Lanka

Ravana accepted the advice of his brother and

ordered the burning of Hanuman's tail Accordingly, much cloth and oil were spent in the process and the fire was lit. Hanuman was led through the streets with a burning tail, but he was lost in deep thought and quite unconcerned with what was happening. Some of the rakshasas ran to Sita to inform her that her vanara friend was a prisoner in their hands and that his tail was being consumed by fire. On hearing this distressing news, Sita begged the god of fire, in the name of her chastity and her single-hearted devotion to her lord, that he should assume the quality of coolness, for the benefit of Hanuman. Her prayers were answered. Hanuman felt no burning in his tail nor any scorching sensation and he thought that this must be due to Rama's grace and Sita's spiritual strength Also, was not Agni, the god of fire, a friend of his father Marut, the god of wind? Hanuman now took thought and sprang up into the air and settled down on the city gate. He contracted his form and cast off his bonds. He seized an iron beam that was conveniently near at hand and brushed off the rakshasas who held him prisoner.

Thereupon, he undertook the remaining task of destroying Lanka and making of its palaces an offering to Agni. He jumped from house to house, setting fire to all of them. The city was in flames. Rakshasa men, women and children were burned down in their thousands. Loud lamentations rose to the skies together with the flames Those who escaped were terror-stricken and wondered whether this vanara was Brahma himself or the lord Vishnu. Was he the fire of the final doom of the world? They ran pell-mell in all directions seeking an escape from the spreading flames which turned the sky scarlet. Hanuman gazed on the scene with complacent satisfaction

A little reflection, however, plunged him into the depths of remorse and he trembled with fear and agitation. "Why did I fall prey to such a fit of anger? They alone are great who subdue their anger. What have I done? Have I not thoughtlessly burnt down Sita as well? These

huge encircling flames have possibly enwrapped her also. Is there a greater fool than myself?" While sunk in this mood of regretful sorrow, he heard the voice of the celestials, travelling in the sky, praising his deeds and saying that Sita had somehow been saved. This aërial talk brought cheer to Hanuman, but he wanted to be personally satisfied that what he had heard was true. So, he jumped into the Asoka grove, saw Sita once again, and took leave of her.

The Triumphant Return

The return journey over the sea was uneventful. At one bound, he reached his friends on the other side and shouted even from a distance that he had seen Sita. They welcomed him with open arms and hugged him in joyful embraces. After refreshing himself and recovering from his fatigue, Hanuman sat down surrounded by his companions, who asked him to narrate all the details of his flight from beginning to end. Hanuman told the story briefly, omitting nothing important, and concluded by saying that what remained to be done thereafter was a matter for their collective decision.

There was some discussion on their future course of action. Some of them, including Hanuman, suggested that they themselves should rescue Sita and place her before Rama. Angada agreed with this view but Jambavan raised his voice in dissent. They must obey orders and not exceed them. They had only been commanded to search for Sita, and they had been given no directions to bring her back should they find her Rama and Sugriva might not like the idea at all. The proper thing for them to do would be to go to the brothers and Sugriva and inform them of the discovery. Jambavan's counsel prevailed.

The vanara contingent started on its return journey and marched swiftly to take to Rama the welcome news. Every one of them looked forward keenly to the coming

war and each wanted to contribute his mite to help Rama. They tore through the sky flying headlong and entered the favourite grove of Sugriva called Madhuvana. The vanaras begged permission of Angada to drink the honey from the trees In consultation with the elders, Angada gave them permission The vanaras drank honey to their heart's content. They were transported with joy and even became inebriate. They teased one another, played pranks among themselves and gambolled about They behaved like a mob in a frenzy of merry excitement. The various guards stationed there, led by their chief Dadhimukha, tried their best to prevent this spoliation of the garden and, finding their attempts useless, assaulted the victorious battalion There was a free fight. Angada and Hanuman gave their companions every encouragement and they routed Dadhimukha and his men. Dadhimukha ran away from the scene, threatening that he would lay a proper complaint against them all before Sugriva So saying, he hastened to Sugriva and told him that the vanara army from the south had practically destroyed the Madhuvana. Sugriva was pleased at this news, for he rightly guessed that such an act of daring could only be done by men who were returning after a successful mission He drew the attention of the brothers to this fact and predicted that in a few moments they would hear good news He asked Dadhimukha to go back and direct the party to hasten to his presence Dadhimukha came back to the grove, communicated Sugriva's orders and humbly begged Angada's pardon for what he had done by way of offering obstruction to them. Angada then gave marching orders and the battalion sped through the sky into the presence of Rama, Lakshmana and Sugriva. Even before they reached the place, Sugriva was able to guess that Hanuman was the one responsible for the success of the mission. Sounds of chatter were heard from the skies and almost immediately down came the party led by Angada and Hanuman. Hanuman prostrated himself before them and pro-

claimed that he had seen Sita and that she was alive. Unbounded joy overwhelmed them all and Rama looked at Hanuman with benevolent and gracious eyes.

Hanuman then narrated to Rama the details of his search and stated how ultimately he had found Sita in the Asoka garden of Ravana, distressed, dejected and sorrowful, unable to endure her separation from her lord and almost ready to put an end to herself He said that he had conversed with her and that she had given him her crest-jewel (*chudamani*) to be handed over to Rama. She had also asked him to remind Rama of the crow's assault on her and what had befallen the crow, and how in playfulness he once placed a vermilion mark on her cheek when he found that the one on the forehead had disappeared. She was unable to live longer than a month more. It was therefore necessary for them to hasten to her rescue.

On seeing her crest-jewel, Rama, with tears flowing from his eyes, told Sugriva that it was the priceless jewel that Janaka had given to his daughter at the time of their marriage On seeing it, he felt as if he had recovered Sita herself. He asked Hanuman to tell him how she was and to recount all that she had said She might be able to live for a month but he could not live without her for even a minute. Hanuman told Rama all about the sufferings which Sita was undergoing as a prisoner in Lanka and about her impatience at the brothers not going to help her. She was asking herself, whether it was because she had fallen from their grace? Did she commit any sin and did not therefore deserve to be rescued from misery? In this way did she lament and implore them for immediate action. "I offered to bring her on my back," said Hanuman, "but she would not agree. She commissioned me to spur you on to immediate effort She could hardly reconcile herself to my leaving Lanka as I was the only friend she had there, and she wondered how you were all going to cross the ocean and come to her in time to save her. Then I said to her: 'There will be no difficulty at all. Rama, Laksh-

mana and Sugriva, with a vast army of vanaras will descend on Laka in no time. The lion-hearted Rama and the skilled archer Lakshmana will be at the gates of Lanka without delay. The rakshasas will all be annihilated. The vanaras will dance with joy. The life in the forest will come to an end and you and Rama will go to Ayodhya for your coronation'. On hearing these encouraging words from me, Sita found some peace of mind, though she was still drowned in sorrow".

CHAPTER VI

YUDDHA KANDA

RAMA bestowed well-deserved praise on Hanuman for his magnificent achievements The only thing that he could then give Hanuman in return was his affectionate embrace and he hugged him to his heart in overflowing gratitude. He then began to consider how the vanara army could reach Lanka and he became depressed at the tremendous difficulty of the task. Sugriva requested Rama to throw off his dejection. He said that a man who allowed himself to be overcome with sorrow and defeatism was destined to failure. There were vanaras with him who would even jump into the fire for Rama's sake. Ravana was sure to be destroyed and Sita rescued. They must first of all think of building a bridge over the sea; once it was accomplished, they would be in Lanka in no time and success would be theirs.

Rama then questioned Hanuman about Lanka, its situation, the location of the capital, the gates of the city, the secrets of the fortress and the strength of the enemy. Hanuman gave him a detailed description. The city had four gates with watch-towers and mounted cannon. There was a big moat around it. The battlements of the fort made it almost impenetrable. Guards and sentinels were

always on the watch. Military discipline was perfect and the valour of the soldiery beyond praise. "But notwithstanding its invulnerability," said Hanuman, "I am confident that we can conquer Lanka, once we cross the sea. What is needed is instant action and you have only to give your command."

The March

The hour of noon, on that very day, was auspicious for beginning the march to Lanka and so Rama gave orders that they should start immediately. He issued detailed directions about the disposition of the troops and the generals commanding them. Nila was to be the commander-in-chief They should be always on the alert and take care that water and provisions on the route were not poisoned by the enemy.

The vanara army of some millions accordingly began their march in battalions and divisions They avoided going through towns and villages and took unfrequented routes. It looked as though the earth was spread over with vanaras. Everyone was eager for battle They marched night and day without rest, clearing many jungles, forests and hills on their way. The Mahendra hill was at last reached and from its crest Rama saw the sea in front of him. Descending from the mountain, the hosts came to the northern shore of the sea. Now they had to consider how to cross the sea.

Ravana's Council

Meanwhile, Lanka was in a nervous state, remembering Hanuman's deeds. Ravana called a meeting of his ministers and took counsel with them as to what was to be done. They had to consider how they could best meet and fight the enemy Rama was sure to cross the sea and reach Lanka with his redoubtable brother and the vanaras. It behoved them therefore to think deeply on the problem of how the city and the army were to be safeguarded. The

ministers said: "Lord, why should you be seized with fear? You vanquished even Kubera himself after routing his yaksha army. The king of the danavas named Madhu befriended you by giving his daughter in marriage to you. The Nagas were subdued by you Even Indra suffered a defeat at your hands, and Yama was no exception. Any number of kshatriya kings have had to acknowledge their defeat at your hands. Why are you bothered about Rama? Your Indrajit, the recipient of many boons from the gods, can, by himself, subjugate Rama and his army. Did he not lead Indra as a prisoner to Lanka and did not Lord Brahma intervene to secure his release?" Thereupon, the rakshasa generals proclaimed their strength one after another commencing with Prahasta, the Commander-in-Chief. They urged Ravana to ignore the casual exploits of Hanuman The vanara had deluded them and snatched a cheap victory Many of them sprang to their arms as if they were ready for battle at that very moment and proclaimed with one voice that they would destroy Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva, Hanuman and the rest of the vanaras.

Vibhishana's Lone Voice

Vibhishana alone, ignoring what the others had said, asked them to reflect calmly It was true, he said, that the rakshasas were of measureless prowess and strength but still it was not right for them to be indifferent to the enemy's strength. Did not Hanuman single-handed cross the ocean and return safely after surveying Lanka and killing many rakshasas? What provocation had Rama given to Ravana that the latter should abduct his wife? People who coveted other men's wives were sure to meet with loss of wealth, life, and name. It would be appropriate that Vaidehi should be returned to Rama Why should they seek an unnecessary quarrel with the valiant and virtuous Rama? "Before Rama destroys the city and all of us, return Sita to him"; he concluded. "I am giving

you this good advice out of fraternal love for you. Subdue your anger which is destructive of virtue and happiness and pursue right conduct. Give back Sita and let us be assured of our lives." On hearing these words from Vibhishana, Ravana dissolved the council.

Next morning, Vibhishana attended another cabinet meeting and once more expressed his views on the situation frankly and boldly. He said that from the moment Sita had been brought into Lanka there had been endless evil omens. The sacrificial fires were dim and enveloped in smoke and did not flame forth properly. The altars were invaded by reptiles. Worms were found in the rice offerings. Cows had become dry. Tuskers were listless. Horses did not neigh properly, nor did they relish their feed. Mules and camels had also become dull. Crows in groups were raising unpleasant cries and were settling down in groups on towers and terraces. Vultures were roaming everywhere. Jackals were raising their cry at dawn and sunset. Wolves could be seen in packs at the city gate. "Please return Maithili", he said once more. But Ravana was obstinate. He saw no danger from Rama who was in his opinion but a poor mortal. So he dismissed Vibhishana.

There was a third meeting of the council presided over by Ravana and it was held in a grand hall. When Ravana arrived, there was not even a whisper to be heard. Solemn silence prevailed Kumbhakarna, who slept for six months and woke up for a day only alternately, happened to be awake at the time and he attended this meeting. Ravana told them all how he was passionately fond of Sita and how she spurned his approaches and how Rama was sure to attack them with Lakshmana, Sugriva and the vanaras "I, who was victorious against the devas, have no fear of ordinary mortals, but still we have to consider ways and means of destroying Rama and Lakshmana and for retaining Sita." Kumbhakarna was angry with Ravana for consulting them after the mischief had been done. He said that Ravana should have thought of all the consequences before

bringing away Sita One who did things later which should have been done before and vice versa could not be called a thoughtful man. A man with an unsteady mind, even though he were strong, was always vulnerable to attack from the enemy. It was Ravana's good fortune that he had not been killed by Rama then and there. Nevertheless, as there was no recalling of the past, he would help his brother to the utmost of his ability and wipe out Rama and Lakshmana.

Mahaparsva, one of the ministers, assured the assembly that he would look after the war and said that Ravana might make Sita his own by force. Ravana then pointed out an insuperable difficulty in the course suggested. Similar conduct on his part towards a celestial damsel called Punjikasthala, who was going to Brahma's abode, had brought on his head a curse from Brahma to the effect that if there was any repetition by him of such misbehaviour, it would result in his head being broken into pieces. It was fear of this imprecation that made him desist from forcing himself on the unwilling Sita

Having heard the words of Ravana and Kumbhakarna, Vibhishana once again came forward with his sound advice. Sita was a dreadful cobra whom Ravana was harbouring in his house without knowing of its danger. Before the vanaras launched their attack, let her be returned; neither Kumbhakarna nor Indrajit nor anyone else could stand before Rama "Rama will not leave you alone, even if you take refuge with the Sun or Indra," he said. Prahasta spoke in opposition to Vibhishana. "We who are not afraid of the celestials or the danavas or the yakhas or the gandharvas are not going to be afraid of a mere man like Rama." Vibhishana did not however refrain from uttering words of caution once more. He spoke derisively of Prahasta in particular, who, he said, was indulging in mere bravado. It was as well that they should tell Ravana what was really good for him. They could not withstand Rama's prowess or valour. There was still time to save

themselves by adopting methods of peace, and returning Maithili He alone was fit to be a minister who, after a proper assessment of the enemy's strength and their own, considering time, place and circumstances, told his master what was good and proper for him.

Indrajit and Vibhishana; a Wordy Duel

This unpalatable advice was resented by Indrajit who taunted Vibhishana with cowardice and unworthiness to be a member of their family He exclaimed: "Did I not bring Indra to the ground on the field of battle, and were not all the devas humbled by me? Why give way to fear and despair?" When Indrajit spoke thus, Vibhishana rebuked him in strong terms and disputed his right even to attend such a meeting, much less to express his opinion. He was a mere boy of immature judgment and thoroughly lacking in discrimination He was really an enemy to Ravana in the disguise of a son. "For what you have said not only you must be beheaded but also he who allowed a rash youth like you into this assembly of councillors. You are stupid, unwise, proud, cruel by nature and wicked," he said. Driven by fate towards doom, Ravana uttered harsh words to Vibhishana. "One can live with an open enemy," he exclaimed, "and with an angry snake, but never with one who is an ally of the enemy. Most of our relatives delight when we fall on evil times The successful, the learned, the virtuous and the courageous are not respected by their relations. Friendship with those who are not Aryan in their virtues is useless. If any one but you, Vibhishana, had spoken thus, he would have been beheaded forthwith You are unworthy to be a scion of our family"

Vibhishana in Rama's Camp

Stung to the quick by these cruel words, Vibhishana jumped up into the sky with his four ministers, and from there, he told Ravana: "You are my elder brother and

you are also the king. Therefore you are like a father and deserve respect. But, alas! you have not taken the path of dharma. I cannot excuse you for these harsh words. I gave you sane advice for your good but those, whom fate grasps in its hold, never listen to such words.. You will find any number of advisers who will tell you what is *pleasing to you; but those who tell unpleasant truths and* those who will listen to them are rare in this world. You had better take care of yourself and Lanka. I go. May all good attend on you and may you be happy."

Vibhishana then flew quickly to the camp of Rama and Lakshmana. The vanara chiefs saw him with his rakshasa atendants descending from the sky. Sugriva immediately conferred with his friends and told Hanuman and the rest that the rakshasas had come there with evil designs The vanara chiefs thereupon asked for immediate orders to pounce on the rakshasas. But Vibhishana stood unperturbed and told the vanara leaders who he was and why he had come. He said that though he had advised his brother Ravana several times to restore Sita, he had refused to take any such course and treated him scornfully as if he were a slave. "So I have given up brothers, wives and children and have come to seek refuge with Rama. Please announce me to him," said Vibhishana Sugriva did not believe Vibhishana's words and told Rama that they must be very careful in accepting him Very probably he was really an enemy who wanted to enter their camp in the guise of a friend. He must have been sent by Ravana. He should be caught immediately and made prisoner

Rama asked the other vanaras what they had to say in the matter and almost all of them with one voice agreed that, coming from the enemy's camp at such a time, he should be suspected and should not be taken as a friend. But Hanuman, who was the sanest among the ministers, struck a different note. He expressed the view that Vibhishana had come at the proper time and under proper cir-

cumstances. If Ravana not only failed to heed his advice but also ill-treated him for it, what else could he do but come over to us? His face indicated no wickedness. If he was bent upon mischief, his true intent could not be concealed "Vibhishana was impressed by your earnestness and ability and was disgusted with his brother's wickedness. He has heard of Vali's fate and of Sugriva's coronation. He has come here deliberately, seeking the kingdom for himself. I think he must be taken into our fold. But, of course, it is for you finally to make up your mind," said Hanuman. Rama remarked that a man who came as a friend should not be forsaken, even though he might have his faults. But Sugriva adhered to his original view, stating that, be he good or bad, one should not forsake one's brother at such a juncture. On hearing this, with a gentle smile, Rama proclaimed his decision. "He has come for the sake of the kingdom It is not everyone who can be a brother like Bharata or a friend like yourself. Let us receive Vibhishana." But Sugriva would not change his view. He insisted that Vibhishana and his four rakshasa attendants should be caught and killed forthwith. Rama, however, did not waver in his resolve to accept Vibhishana and give him protection. "If I want, I can destroy the whole world in no time Vibhishana cannot do me the slightest harm. It is improper to reject those who come seeking our protection, whether they be vicious or virtuous. A refugee, who is turned away, takes away all the merit from the man who spurns him. He who prostrates himself before you, affirming that he is your man, must be received and protected as a friend. I have vowed to give protection to everyone who surrenders himself to me. Therefore go and bring him, whether he be Vibhishana or even Ravana himself."

Sugriva carried out Rama's behest and Vibhishana descended from the skies into Rama's presence and fell at his feet, stating that his life, his prosperity and his kingdom were all in his hands Rama welcomed him and ask-

ed him to give him details about Ravana's strength. Vibhishana did so. Rama then took a vow to kill Ravana and all the other rakshasa leaders in Lanka and proclaim Vibhishana as king in Ravana's place. Vibhishana promised every help in the gigantic task before him. Rama issued orders to Lakshmana to bring waters from the seas and bathe Vibhishana so that he might be crowned king forthwith, even in advance. This was done. When Rama began to think of ways and means to cross the ocean, Vibhishana suggested to him that he should first of all propitiate the ocean deity to enable them to cross over. Lakshmana and Sugriva agreed and Rama, seating himself on *kusa* grass on the sea-shore, began the worship of the sea-god.

Spy Suka

Throughout this time, a rakshasa spy called Sardula had observed the enemy's movements and reported them to Ravana. The king sent Suka as an emissary to Sugriva with this message: "You are like a brother to me. You have nothing to gain by this strife. What is it to you that I have carried away Rama's wife? You had better go back to Kishkindha. Lanka cannot be captured by the vanaras, when it could not be conquered even by the devas or the gandharvas." Taking the form of a bird, Suka flew over to Sugriva and delivered the message. The vanaras seized him an subjected him to physical torture. Suka then appealed piteously to Rama for help stating that, messengers like him should not be killed Rama ordered the vanaras to release him. After he had been set free, Suka asked Sugriva if he had any message to convey to Ravana. Sugriva asked him to tell Ravana, "You are not my friend. I have no pity for you. You have never done any good. You are my enemy as I am Rama's friend You deserve to be put to death like my wicked brother Vali. I will kill all of you and reduce Lanka to ashes immediately. You may take refuge in the sun or in the sky or in the

nether regions or even at the feet of Lord Siva. You cannot escape destruction at Rama's hands. You do not know Rama's prowess''. Angada, Vali's son, was sure however, that Suka was not an emissary to be entrusted with any message, but a spy, for he was keenly surveying the vanara forces and their strength. Therefore Angada and his companions began to torture Suka once again. But Rama interceded and secured his release a second time.

Sagara Appears

Though Rama worshipped Sagara the sea-god as ordained in the sastras for three days and nights, the god was not propitiated. Rama thereupon became angry and pointing out to Lakshmana the indifference with which he was treated, he vowed that he would dry up the ocean by his arrows, and he directed his arrow against the sea at once. At once, there was great turmoil and commotion in the waters. As he was about to dart a second one, Lakshmana took hold of his bow and begged him to desist. Similar appeals were heard from the skies. Rama was not pacified and was about to hurl the Brahmastra against the ocean. The sky, the earth and the mountains trembled; everything became enveloped in deep darkness; heavy clouds gathered; peals of thunder were heard; and lightning flashed across the skies. The sea receded for some distance. The presiding deity emerged from it, wearing a garland of red flowers and shining brilliantly. He stood with folded hands before Rama and begged his forgiveness, pointing out that just as earth, wind, sky, water and light exhibited their natural propensities, it was natural for the ocean to be deep and expansive and unfordable. It was not out of any disrespect or disobedience that he did not yield a passage through for Rama and his forces. He finally told Rama that if Nala, a vanara who was the recipient of a boon from Sagara's father, constructed a bridge, he would give it every support. Nala who was thus reminded of his boon, thereupon undertook the construction. Trees, stones

and boulders were brought from all directions by the vanaras and Nala built the bridge in five days. Then the army crossed over, led by Rama and Lakshmana, who were carried on the shoulders of Hanuman and Angada respectively.

Lanka in Terror

Meanwhile, many inauspicious omens were seen over Lanka. Mild tremors of the earth occurred Trees fell on the ground of their own accord. Clouds dropped reddish coloured rain. Birds and animals began to make all kinds of fearful noises facing the sun. Around the sun there was a red circle and in the sun was seen a black spot. All of these were omens which indicated evil to Lanka; so thought Rama, and he gave instant marching orders.

In the meantime, war drums were heard from Lanka and the vanara army could not endure the tumult. Similarly, the rakshasas could not bear to hear the slogans of the vanaras. Rama gazed at Lanka in astonishment. He divided his troops into sections, placed veteran leaders at the head of each and stationed himself in front of the army with his brother Lakshmana. Sugriva was to guard the rear. They then released Suka, the spy from Lanka, whom they had kept as a prisoner in their camp. He at once flew back to Ravana in his battered state, and told him what had happened to him and reported: "A bridge over the ocean has been built; the vanara army has crossed over; Rama with drawn bow is at the gates You must either deliver up Sita or give him battle". Ravana could not brook these words. He said that the first alternative was impossible and that he was prepared for the second. He exclaimed that Rama did not know of his prowess or valour or his past achievements and that it was for this reason that he had been foolhardy enough to venture to attack Lanka.

Ravana, however, was not at ease. The building of a bridge over the sea was something unheard of, and its crossing over by the vanara army was indeed an unprece-

dented achievement. He therefore asked his ministers Suka and Sarana to go into the enemy's camp unobserved and come back with full reports of the troop movements and dispositions. They were to observe and note the strength of Rama and Lakshmana and to ascertain who was the generalissimo of the vanara forces. Suka and Sarana accordingly went to Rama's camp in disguise but were unable to count the enemy forces. As they were looking on, Vibhishana spotted them. He seized them and brought them before Rama as Ravana's ministers. They became thoroughly frightened and told the truth about themselves and their mission. Rama smiled and directed that they should be allowed to observe things which they had so far failed to see and even asked Vibhishana to show them all that remained to be seen. He said that they need not be afraid of any harm to themselves. After seeing everything, they were to go and tell Ravana that it was now the time for him to exhibit that strength on which he had relied when carrying away Sita by force, and that the battle would commence the next morning Suka and Sarana were greatly pleased at the treatment Rama accorded to them and proclaiming "May success attend you", they returned to Lanka and told Ravana all about the strength of the vanara army and the extraordinary magnanimity, charm and ability of Rama and Lakshmana. They said: "Rama, Lakshmana, Vibhishana and Sugriva can by themselves destroy Lanka, without the help of any army. Why! even without the other three, Rama alone could achieve the ruin of Lanka"

Ravana was displeased with these words However, he ascended a lofty tower to survey the enemy hordes. He saw the vast and endless vanara camp and asked Sarana to tell him who the leading commanders on the other side were and what was their strength. Sarana pointed out to his master such chiefs as Nila, Angada and Nala and described their phenomenal prowess in battle. He also gave Ravana some idea of the strength of the battalions and

divisions under the command of each one of them and mentioned in particular Jambavan, Kesari, Mainda and Dvivida. Then he went on to describe the valour of Hanuman, who was eager to destroy Lanka by himself, without the help of any one else. He also pointed out Rama, Lakshmana, Vibhishana and Sugriva and spoke of their valour and wound up by saying: "Such is the enemy's strength; you must make a stupendous effort to avoid defeat and secure victory."

The rakshasa king could not endure this praise of the enemy and severely rebuked Suka and Sarana. He said that such ministers were mill-stones round a king's neck. Those who praised the enemy in a crisis like this deserved to be hanged. "But your past services soften my anger. Get out of my presence," exclaimed Ravana The two ministers quickly departed, invoking victory on their lord. Ravana sent other spies to bring more news of the enemy. One of them was Sardula and he was caught, but again Rama ordered his release. The other spies were soundly beaten and turned back.

Sardula, on his return to Lanka, said that it was not possible to estimate the strength of the enemy. He confessed that he had been caught by the vanaras before he had had a chance to observe things and had been well and truly beaten; after that, he had been taken in procession before Rama. It was Rama who ordered his release. Sardula wound up his narrative thus: "Before Rama launches his attack, please return Sita or else prepare for war. Ten million vanaras are ready for battle, led by the illustrious Rama, who has no equal in this world, and whose great qualities are impossible to describe adequately. Even Indra would not dare to stand in the line of his arrows' light".

Ravana's Stratagem

Ravana sent for a rakshasa called Viddyujjihva and asked him to create an illusion. He was to prepare a false

head of Rama, and his bow. Having got these ready, Ravana went to Sita and told her that there was no further use in her clinging to a dead man. Rama was killed in battle, Lakshmana, Sugriva, Hanuman and the other vanara warriors were routed. In proof of the truth of his story, Ravana called in Viddyujjihva, who brought with him Rama's head which was wet and dripping with blood and also his great bow. Ravana pointed to these and said: "It would be prudent on your part now at least to accept me". Sita wailed biterly over the fate that had overtaken her. The one man in the world who could have saved her was dead. How could he depart from this world leaving her behind? After his pledge at the time of their marriage, he had no right to desert her in this manner; he should have taken her with him also. "Oh! Ravana," she cried, "cast me on the body of my lord Rama, unite my head with his head and my body with his body so that I may accompany him to the other world". In the midst of her lamentation, Prahasta, the Commander-in-Chief, was announced as there was some urgent business to transact; Ravana left at once, and with him disappeared the false head and bow of Rama.

One of the women guards, named Sarama, who had struck up a friendship with Sita, now began to comfort her. She told her that, while in hiding, she had overheard what Ravana had said and that the whole thing was an illusion. Rama was not killed but was alive. In fact, Rama was even now besieging the citadel and Ravana was engaged in consulting his ministers. The sound of war drums could be heard and the city was astir with military movements. There was no cause for sorrow Prosperity was going to attend her and ruin awaited the rakshasas. "Worship the Sun-god and success will be yours", said Sarama. "If you are really my friend," said Sita, "you will go and find out exactly what Ravana is doing". Sarama did so unseen, and returned to Sita and told her that Ravana, though advised by both his mother and an

aged minister to send her back to Rama, was adamant in his resolve to keep her in Lanka.

Advice to Ravana

While Ravana was sitting in his council hall, the sound of conchs, kettle-drums and horns was heard and it caused him some dismay. His grandfather, Malyavan by name, advised him against war and suggested that he should make peace by returning Sita Ravana should not antagonise the whole world by such behaviour; and he already had innumerable enemies; Lanka was beset with inauspicious omens; a dark fierce headless body could be seen moving about the city dragging people to their doom. Was not Rama the god Vishnu himself, in human form? He was not an ordinary mortal. The building of the bridge over the sea was positive proof of this. Ravana should send back Sita. Caught in the net of fate, Ravana paid no heed to Malyavan's advice He said· "I may break, but I shall never bend. That is my nature, and nature cannot be overcome". Malyavan made no reply, thinking that evil would bring its own retribution.

War Preparations

Ravana then began to make his arrangements for war. He posted his generals to guard the four main approaches—Prahasta to guard the east, Mahaparsva and Mahodara the south, Indrajit to protect the western gate and Suka and Sarana the north.

Meanwhile on the vanara side, there was a council of war to discuss information furnished by the ministers of Vibhishana, who had returned from Lanka after secretly spying on army manoeuvres and troop dispositions. Rama ordered Nila to besiege the eastern gate with the divisions under his command. Angada was to assault the southern gate and Hanuman the western. Rama and Lakshmana would personally superintend the operations at the northern gate. Vibhishana was to protect the centre. A small hill

called Suvela had to be ascended before the assault on Lanka could be launched. Rama was the first to reach the top, followed by the rest From there, Ravana's citadel was clearly within view. But just then night began to fall and all further activities had to be suspended. Day-break disclosed the grandeur of Lanka and its position of vantage. The city was built so loftily that it seemed to touch the very skies. Rama was astonished at the sight.

Sugriva happened to see Ravana in a lofty tower of the fortress and, unable to restrain himself, jumped on to the tower and seized Ravana. A long duel ensued between them, and for some moments they hung from the tower, each holding the other in close combat But at last Ravana's superior strength began to tell and Sugriva, realising this, eluded the enemy's grasp and jumped back into the company of his friends. Rama reprimanded Sugriva for this very rash act as he had placed all of them in a position of anxiety and suspense; if any harm had befallen him, the war would have been lost without a fight. Sugriva said in his defence that he could not endure even the sight of the man who had abducted Sita.

Rama then descended from the hill-top followed by the army and laid siege to the northen gate, as it was the gate guarded by Ravana in person. Similarly, Nila, Angada, and Hanuman took their respective posts at the other gates of the city. Sugriva took charge of the central division. Millions of vanaras surrounded the city with trees, stones and other weapons in their hands. Their thunderous roar stupefied the rakshasas. The city itself shook to its very foundations.

Angada's Mission

But before the battle began, Rama, who knew full well the duties and proprieties of kingly conduct, consulted his ministers, and with their approval sent Angada to Ravana with a final offer of peace in these words: "Prosperity is forsaking you. You are seeking your own destruction.

Your sins against the sages and the celestials, the Gandharvas, the Apsarases, the Nagas and the Yakshas, committed from a fancied security in Brahma's boons, are now bearing their fruit When killed by me, you will follow in the path of those whom you have killed. I am determined to rid the world of the rakshasas. If you do not wish this to happen, return Sita, and surrender yourself to me''. Angada took one leap into the presence of Ravana who was in council with his ministers. He announced himself and delivered the message faithfully. Ravana worked himself up into a fury and ordered his ministers to seize the impertinent and truculent vanara. Angada allowed himself to be caught so that he might show his strength. No sooner had they taken hold of him than he rose into the skies with his captors suspended from his arms. He then shook them off from a great height and they fell down dead. Thereafter, Angada attacked the main tower of Ravana's palace and smashed it to pieces. He proclaimed in a stentorian voice that he was Rama's messenger and then returned to Rama

The Assault

The siege now commenced in right earnest, and the vanaras began to scale the ramparts of the city and destroy the walls, gateways and groves The moats were filled with earth and stones and the towers were razed to the ground. There was a tremendous charge on Lanka from all sides with the battle-cry ''May victory attend Rama, Lakshmana and Sugriva''. Vibhishana stood by the side of Rama, carrying his heavy mace.

On the other side, Ravana ordered his army to march out and repel the attack. The armies met and there was a fierce battle, after which countless rakshasas lay dead on the battlefield. The battle raged furiously and the earth became red with blood. The battle quickly degenerated into duels between prominent rakshasas and vanaras from the opposing sides Pairs such as Angada and Indra-

jit, Jambumali and Hanuman, Sushena and Vidyunmali, Sugriva and Prahasta took part. Lakshmana came to grips with Virupaksha Four rakshasas attacked Rama. Nikumbha and Nila wrested with each other. Jambumali, Vidyunmali, Virupaksha and all those who attacked Rama were killed.

Though night came on, the battle did not cease. The rakshasas swallowed the vanaras and the vanaras ate up several rakshasas. The tumult of battle rent the air. Chaos and confusion reigned supreme. In the darkness, friends could not be distinguished from foes. The rakshasas, who were capable of making themselves invisible, fought their enemies unseen The vanaras, who could not see their targets, sought Rama's protection. Rama darted his arrows all round and many of the rakshasa commanders retreated from the battlefield severely wounded. Everywhere, arrows bearing the name of Rama were to be seen flying through the air. Meanwhile Angada destroyed the chariot and horses of Indrajit; and the latter disappeared in something resembling a smoke screen. Everyone praised Angada for this feat. But Indrajit did not really retire from the field, he hid himself and waged a war of deception.

Indrajit Binds Rama and Lakshmana

Several vanaras flew into the sky in search of Indrajit who remained invisible. His arrows fell on them all, but he was himself unseen. He hurled the nagastra at Rama and Lakshmana and bound them hand and foot. They became motionless, reeled and fell to the ground There was not an inch of space on their bodies which had not been hit by Indrajit's arrows. Blood oozed from every pore. The vanara forces were bowed down with sorrow. On seeing the brothers helpless, slow of breath and covered with blood, even Sugriva, Vibhishana, Nila and Hanuman despaired. Indrajit rejoiced and spoke proudly to his companions of his achievement. Believing Rama and

Lakshmana to be dead, Indrajit went to Lanka and put joy and cheer into the hearts of the rakshasas. He told his father that Rama and Lakshmana lay prostrate on the battlefield; and Ravana embraced his valiant son. Meanwhile, on the battlefield, Vibhishana sprinkled Sugriva's face with cool water and infused courage into him. He assured him that Rama and Lakshmana would survive and reminded Sugriva of his duty to put heart into his forces which were in full retreat. The vanara chiefs kept a close guard over Rama but all of them were nervous. If a blade of grass shook, they thought it was the work of rakshasas; so frightened were they. Ravana took advantage of the situation and gave orders to the women, who kept Sita prisoner, to inform her that Rama and Lakshmana had been killed by Indrajit and to take her in his aerial chariot and show her their prostrate bodies. When Sita saw Rama and Lakshmana apparently lifeless, she was drowned in an ocean of misery. She exclaimed: "Alas, all the words of the soothsayers are false. They said that widowhood was not to be my lot and that I would have children. They said that I would be the queen of one of the greatest kings and that I would be crowned together with him My sorrow is not so much for Rama or Lakshmana as for that great lady Kausalya who will be counting the days and hours, waiting to see the brothers and me". At this point, Trijata, one of the rakshasis on guard, begged Sita not to weep and wail. She was sure that Rama and Lakshmana were alive and not dead. They were invincible. It was true that for the moment they were unconscious but they did not appear to be lifeless. None of the characteristics of dead men could be seen in them. With these encouraging words, she took Sita back to the Asoka grove.

Rama's Grief

After some time, Rama slowly regained consciousness and on seeing Lakshmana prostrate at his side, his heart broke and he exclaimed: "When he is dead, what further

use is there in life? One may find many women like Sita in the world but not a brother like Lakshmana. Let me give up my life here and now. I have no desire to live. What am I to tell Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra if I return to Ayodhya without him?" Addressing Sugriva, he said, "Oh! Sugriva, you have done your best. You had better return with what remains of the vanara army. I know I have failed to crown Vibhishana king of Lanka but what can an ordinary mortal do? I shall follow in the footsteps of Lakshmana". So saying he fell into a swoon again. Meanwhile, Sugriva asked Angada, "Why is our army fleeing?" and Angada pointed to the prostrate forms of Rama and Lakshmana. At that time, almost all the vanaras were disheartened and were beating a hasty retreat. They did not even look at each other; they did not even turn back to see who or what was behind them. They jostled one another and trod over the fallen in their retreat. Just then, Vibhishana happened to come there with his mace. The vanaras were afraid of him, taking him to be Indrajit, and they fled in all directions. Sugriva thereupon asked Jambavan to instil fresh courage into the army and to reorganise the forces once again. Vibhishana, on witnessing the scene, became despondent. Sugriva assuaged his grief and assured him that everything would end well. He then turned to his father-in-law Sushena and asked him to take the wounded Rama and Lakshmana to Kishkindha and added that he would remain behind, kill Ravana and bring back Sita. Sushena reminded Sugriva that there were natural herbs which could revive even those who were about to die and said that Hanuman should be sent to fetch them.

Garuda

As they were talking thus, strong winds blew in their direction, scattering the heavy clouds and even bringing down huge trees. This betokened the approach of Garuda, the inveterate foe and slayer of snakes. As he hovered

in the skies above and was about to descend, all the snakes of the nagastra that had wound themselves round Rama and Lakshmana crawled away in haste. Garuda came in human form and passed his hands gently over the bodies of Rama and Lakshmana. Rama and Lakshmana thereupon got up and gazed at his resplendent form. Rama, whose heart melted on seeing him, asked him who he was that had conferred such favour on them. Garuda said that he was their great friend and that he had come to release them from the snake-shackles of Indrajit's arrows. He pointed out that the rakshasas were skilful in deceitful war and cautioned Rama and Lakshmana against their tricks and stratagems He then embraced Rama and left him saying that at the end of the war when Ravana was killed and Sita was recovered, they would come to know who he was.

Renewal of the Fight

On seeing Rama and Lakshmana hale and hearty again, the vanara forces roared like lions, lashed their tails and danced with joy. Once again, the war drums were beaten and they prepared themselves for a fresh fight. Doubts began to enter Ravana's heart when he heard the shouts of the vanaras and it occurred to him that Rama and Lakshmana might have revived. Confirmatory news soon reached him. Disheartened, he sent Dhumraksha to the field of battle. This general came to the battlefield in high spirits with many army divisions under him and waged a valiant fight but Hanuman vanquished him. Then from Lanka came Vajradamshtra, who fought like Yama himself and Angada engaged him. Vajradamshtra's chariot was soon put out of action, but he stood his ground with a heavy mace in his hand. Angada fought a duel and killed him.

Akampana Killed

Next came Akampana who was so called because he could not be shaken even by the gods. In the grim fight

that ensued, even the forms of the soldiers became indistinct and streams of blood ran over the battlefield like water. Kumuda, Nila, Mainda and Dvivida faced the rakshasa attack. Akampana directed his attention against them and his onslaught was so terrific that the vanaras were routed Hanuman interceded and threw a huge boulder against Akampana who broke it in mid-air with his arrows. Hanuman then took up a lofty tree and hurled it against the rakshasa but Akampana stood like a rock and snatched the tree from Hanuman's hand. Instantly, Hanuman took another and hurled it against Akampana who was struck down dead. The rakshasas who survived him ran back to Lanka. Ravana was perturbed at this turn of events. He went round the city inspecting the troop stations and posts found it to be besieged on all sides by vanaras. He ordered Prahasta, his Commander-in-Chief, to march against the enemy Prahasta, Kumbhakarna, Indrajit and Nikumbha were the only men left, who were fit to carry such a heavy load of responsibility.

Prahasta Slain

After going through every form of worship and prayer for success, Prahasta issued out of Lanka to the accompaniment of war drums, conchs, cymbals and horns. Evil omens beset him; but undaunted, Prahasta rushed forward like a moth towards a flame. His appearance was strikingly heroic and the vanara army got ready for the impact Both sides were determined to fight to a finish. Many vanara leaders like Dvivida, Dvimukha, Jambavan and Tara went into action, and the battlefield became as red with blood as the earth with *palasa* flowers in the month of Madhava. Nile, who was the Commander-in-Chief on the vanara side struck down Prahasta and smashed his head to smithereens.

Ravana Enters the Fray

When Ravana heard of the end of Prahasta, he sank in sorrow but at the same time became livid with anger.

"I shall go to the battle myself and destroy Rama, Lakshmana and the vanaras. I shall offer oblations of vanara blood to the earth". So saying, he issued forth from the city in a shining car, to the accompaniment of war drums, trumpets, shouts and slogans. On seeing the huge army of rakshasas that accompanied Ravana, Rama asked Vibhishana who its leaders were. Vibhishana mentioned several names such as Indrajit, Mahodara and Nikumbha. Finally, he described Ravana himself in these words: "He is accompanied by hideous and fierce rakshasas He is the man who subdued the pride of the Devas; a white umbrella is spread over his head and he shines like Rudra with his *bhutaganas;* he wears a crown and dangling ear-rings; he vanquished even Mahendra and Yama, he is the lord of the rakshasas and is blazing like the Sun". Rama was struck with astonishment and exclaimed: "How glorious and dazzling is Ravana! His radiance is like that of the Sun and those who are with him are equally valorous It is my good fortune that he comes before my sight. I shall take my revenge". He took up his bow and arrows and got ready. Ravana turned round and ordered most of the army to get back into Lanka and guard the city, lest the vanaras should take possession of it by force or treachery.

Sugriva was the first to attack Ravana with the crest of a mountain. Ravana destroyed it with his sharp arrows and hurled a deadly dart at Sugriva; and the latter lost consciousness and fell down shrieking. Thereupon, several of the vanara chiefs attacked Ravana but many of them shared the same fate as Sugriva. The rest ran to Rama and sought his protection. As Rama was stepping forward to meet Ravana, Lakshmana asked him to stand back, assuring him that he himself would meet the foe. But Rama dissuaded Lakshmana and spoke of Ravana's far-famed strength and valour. He asked Lakshmana to be on the alert and have his bow ready. Meanwhile, Hanuman entered the fray and addressed Ravana thus: "You may have

been granted a boon of immunity from devas, danavas, gandharvas, yakshas and rakshasas, but you must be afraid of the vanaras. Here is my right fist which is going to deprive you of your life'' Ravana's eyes became bloodshot with anger and he challenged Hanuman to show his strength Hanuman asked him to remember what had happened to his son Aksha. Unable to bear this taunt, Ravana hit Hanuman's chest with a terrific blow of his hand and Hanuman shivered and shook. But recovering after a short while, he turned the attack on Ravana and it was now Ravana's turn to quiver. After taking breath for a few moments, the rakshasa king exclaimed. "You are a worthy foeman''; but Hanuman was by no means pleased; he was sorry that his blow had not extinguished Ravana. A second blow from Ravana rendered Hanuman powerless. Ravana next turned his attention to Nila who was nearby. Hanuman soon recovered from his stupor and sarcastically remarked to Ravana: "It is not proper for you to run away while engaged in a duel with me''. Meanwhile, Nila contracted his body and hopped from place to place He was seen right on the top of Ravana's flag. then on the top of his bow and finally on Ravana's crown. Everyone praised his nimbleness. Even Ravana wondered at his agility and hurled on him an arrow of fire. It struck Neela in the chest and he fell down but life did not desert him. Lakshmana was the next object of Ravana's attack The prince twanged his bow fearlessly and accosted Ravana, "Come, come against me, the vanaras are not your equals''. The angry Ravana retorted: "It is my good fortune that I have seen you—you who have a diseased mind. You are now going to meet with destruction from my arrows''. Lakshmana replied without the slightest trace of nervousness. "You, confirmed sinner, the truly great never indulge in vain boasts. I know your valour, strength and courage. Here am I standing in front of you Come and attack me without so much bravado''. Each then sped his arrows against the other in quick and endless succession.

They fought an equal battle and Ravana was astonished at Lakshmana's skill. There were moments when one or the other went down. Finally, Ravana's bow was broken and his body was pierced with arrows and covered with blood. He then threw at Lakshmana the sakti given to him by Brahma, which fell on Lakshmana's chest blazing like fire. As Lakshmana was collapsing. Ravana seized him with the idea of carrying him away but he became a dead weight and could not be lifted, even by one who had shaken mountains like Himavan, Mandara and Meru. Seeing Lakshmana's plight, Sugriva attacked Ravana and brought him to his knees Meanwhile Hanuman carried Lakshmana away from the scene of combat. This feat was possible only because Hanuman was a true devotee. He who could not be moved by the enemy became light as a feather to a devotee The sakti weapon now returned to Ravana.

Rama and Ravana

It was now Rama's turn to meet Ravana and as he was stepping forward, Hanuman came up to him and requested him to mount on his shoulders and thus wage battle with the enemy. Thus carried by Hanuman, Rama met Ravana and accosted him in these words: "Stop, stop; how can you escape? You may seek the protection of Indra, Yama, Surya, Brahma, Agni or even Sankara, you may attempt to escape in ten different directions but I shall not let you go. You have laid Lakshmana low and it is now my duty to avenge this wrong by exterminating you and your children and your children's children. Here are the arrows with which thousands of rakshasas were slain in Janasthana". Ravana first directed his attention to Hanuman, remembering his previous misdeeds, but his attack did no injury to Hanuman who became more radiant then ever. Rama was infuriated by this attack on Hanuman. He fell on Ravana and destroyed his chariot, horses and charioteer, as well as his flag and royal umbrella. He

then pierced Ravana in the chest with his sharp arrows. The rakshasa, who never feared even when Indra's weapon struck him, writhed with pain and trembled when struck with Rama's arrows. His bow dropped from his hand and his crown was broken. Taking pity on him, Rama said: "You have waged a grim and great fight but I have destroyed your strength and you have become powerless. I do not propose to despatch you to your doom yet. I give you permission to go back to Lanka, take rest and come again fully equipped with your chariot and bow; and then you shall realise my strength once more". Ravana was greatly humiliated and retreated in haste to Lanka Everyone was delighted at his discomfiture.

Back in Lanka, Ravana began to reflect on the situation. Rama's arrows caused consternation in his mind and made him faint-hearted. He told the rakshasas assembled around him that all his great austerities to secure invincibility had been in vain, for he had been defeated by a mere man. Had not Brahma told him that the danger to him would come from a mortal? Unfortunately, he had not asked for the boon of not meeting with death at the hands of a man. "Was I not cursed by Anaranya of the Ikshvaku line that, in his lineage, one would be born, at whose hands I would perish? Did not Vedavati, whom I molested, curse me and is Sita not that Vedavati? Uma, Nandikesvara and Rambha—every one of them pronounced curses in their turn. The words of sages never prove false". As matters had come to a crisis, Ravana asked his followers to wake up his brother Kumbhakarna so that he might try his strength against the formidable enemy.

Kumbhakarna

Kumbhakarna was accordingly aroused from his long sleep by the adoption of all kinds of methods including physical violence. The moment he got up, a heavy and rich repast was spread out before him. After finishing

the meal, Kumbhakarna asked them why they had woken him up and he was told of the exploits of Rama and the vanaras and how the rakshasas had met with a succession of disasters. Kumbhakarna became infuriated at the news and made preparations to start for the battlefield saying that he would meet his elder brother only after destroying the enemy. But Ravana wished to see him beforehand. Kumbhakarna therefore proceeded to Ravana's palace. Even from that distance, the vanara army became terror-stricken at the sight of him. Some took refuge with Rama, some dropped down from fear, some lay down on the ground shamming death, and some ran away from the field.

Rama, when he saw the huge form of Kumbhakarna, asked Vibhishana who it was, as he had never before seen any human being of such proportions. Vibhishana then gave a short account of Kumbhakarna's strength and valour. In a fight with the devas, he had pulled out the tusks of Indra's elephant and hit Indra with them. As soon as he was born, he began to swallow other creatures and became a menace to society. Several people repaired to Lord Brahma and implored him to relieve them from Kumbhakarna's atrocities. Lord Brahma thereupon pronounced a curse that, from that day onwards, he would fall into an everlasting sleep like a dead man. Ravana interceded and begged Brahma to withdraw the curse; and Brahma modified it by ordaining that he should sleep for six months at a stretch, wake up for one day, then go to sleep again for six months and so on. Seeing the vanaras running in all directions in bewildered confusion, Rama asked Vibhishana to inform them that what they saw at a distance was not a rakshasa but a gigantic machine and that they need have no fear. At the same time, he asked Nila to gather the forces together and be fully prepared for a mighty encounter.

When Kumbhakarna came into his precence, Ravana informed him of the impending danger and begged him to go into action at once. Kumbhakarna condemned Ravana

for his misdeeds which he had committed without consulting anyone and without any forethought. He said that kings who did not bestow careful thought over the course of action they proposed to take were bound to come to grief. Ravana resented this admonition coming at such a time from his brother and chided him roundly. Kumbhakarna agreed to forget the past and think of the future. He assured Ravana that he would employ all his strength to wipe out the enemy lock, stock and barrel and asked Ravana to relax completely and enjoy himself as he pleased. Mahodara warned Kumbhakarna against going alone to the battlefield to wage a fight with such a foe as Rama, and he suggested to Ravana how he could secure the fulfilment of his desire. "Some of us will go to the fight and return after wounding the enemy and tell you that we have swallowed Rama and Lakshmana. We shall receive from you not merely approbation but also costly presents. You may then broadcast our victory and thereafter go to Sita and again woo her stating that she has lost her husband and that she should reconsider her decision in the changed circumstances. With hope destroyed, Sita will ultimately yield to you". Kumbhakarna roundly abused Mahodara for such stupid advice which had already brought Lanka into trouble. He said that real friends must state the truth and not what was merely pleasing to hear.

Kumbhakarna's Fight and Death

He took leave of Ravana and issued forth with his armour and his favourite spear, which he had employed with deadly effect in many a previous battle. As he stepped out, he looked like Lord Narayana himself when He took his three steps to crush Bali. Many troops accompanied him and the shouts that they raised resounded in the enemy's camp. The omens however were not favourable. Birds flew round and round inauspiciously over Kumbhakarna's head. Vultures flew in a line across his path. His left eye throbbed and his left shoulder quivered.

Meteors fell from the sky. Disregarding them, Kumbhakarna marched on, looking like a veritable mountain in motion. At the very sight of him, the vanaras were seized with fear and several of them fell to the ground like trees cut at their roots. Some of them were so afraid that they ran away in all directions. Angada, however, rallied them round him, and with difficulty, brought them back to the field and persuaded them to attack. The enemy looked more like a machine than an animate rakshasa. Stones, boulders and huge trees thrown at Kumbhakarna recoiled from his body without doing him any damage. He struck down many vanaras. Some climbed up trees, some flew up into the sky and some took to the bridge by which they had come; some hid themselves in caves, some took refuge in the sea and some feigned death. Again Angada infused courage into the army and exhorted them not to behave like cowards. If they won, glory would be theirs; if they fell in battle, they were sure to attain the heavenly abode; they should not make themselves objects of ridicule and scorn. But the vanaras were in such a state of fright that they said that they had seen enough of Kumbhakarna and that their own lives were precious to them. Angada once again encouraged them, pointing out that Kumbhakarna would not leave the battle field alive after meeting Rama.

Meanwhile, Kumbhakarna employed his mace to deal dire destruction and thousands and thousands of vanaras were laid low, and he swallowed many of them. From the sky, Hanuman rained over him a torrent of massive rocks and trees. Kumbhakarna foiled them all and taking up his spear attacked Hanuman impetuously Hanuman sent up a cry of distress and vomited blood. Five stalwart vanara leaders—Rishabha, Sarabha, Nila, Gavaksha and Gandhamadana rushed to Hanuman's rescue and fell on Kumbhakarna, but they could achieve nothing; in fact, they were rendered helpless. The rakshasa lifted several vanaras and ate them up wholesale. The remnants of the vanara forces now sought Rama's protection. Angada met

Kumbhakarna and gave him battle He parried his spear attack and struck him so violently on the chest that the rakshasa became unconscious for a time. Reviving soon enough; Kumbhakarna hit Angada with such tremendous force that Angada fell down senseless. Kumbhakarna then rushed against Sugriva and hurled his spear at him, but the redoubtable Hanuman intercepted its flight and broke it into bits, causing great delight to the vanara army. Finding his weapon thus broken, Kumbhakarna threw a huge rock at Sugriva, who fell down unconscious on account of its impact. The rakshasa carried Sugriva away into Lanka. Sugriva recovered consciousness, however, while being carried into Lanka and pulled off Kumbhakarna's ears and bit his nose. The two engaged themselves in an encounter and Sugriva succeeded in releasing himself from Kumbhakarna's hold; and jumping up into the sky, returned to Rama's presence.

Ashamed at this set-back, Kumbhakarna again returned to the battle and wrought havoc Lakshmana engaged him in combat. Kumbhakarna treated the young hero with the greatest respect and praised his courage and skill. He sought Lakshmana's permission to proceed against Rama and Lakshmana agreed, with a derisive laugh In the course of his march towards Rama, Kumbhakarna killed countless vanaras. Seeing Vibhishana before him, Kumbhakarna addressed him thus: "Attack me if you like, my brother. Give up fraternal affection and do what pleases Rama. Our work is done You are the only one among the rakshasas who is attached to truth and right conduct Such people are not subject to any sorrow Our lineage will be perpetuated by you. You are going to win the rakshasa kingdom with the help of Raghava. You are sure to be safe. But get out of my way, for when I am mad with the frenzy of fight, I cannot distinguish between friend and foe". Vibhishana retired to a solitary place and sank into a mood of reflection.

Meanwhile, Rama and Kumbhakarna encountered each

other and there was a long and bloody fight between them in which many famous missiles were exchanged. The mighty rakshasa was no equal however to Rama's incisive arrows. Many a time he reeled and finally his head was severed from his body by Rama's Indra-astra. His gigantic body crashed. The whole neighbourhood shook from its foundations to its towers and many fighters were caught and crushed in the fall. Unbounded joy pervaded the vanara forces while deep sorrow overtook the rakshasas.

Despondent Ravana

Ravana's grief knew no bounds After the loss of such a brother, he felt he had no interest in the kingdom or in Sita or in his own life He had failed to take the sound advice offered by Vibhishana; he had even banished him for having told the truth He must now reap the bitter fruits of his actions. He sent his four sons and two commanders to the battlefield, but they too were killed. A great fit of despondency came over Ravana. He wondered at Rama's prowess and felt convinced that he was Lord Narayana himself He gave orders however for the vigilant protection of the city and of the Asoka garden

Indrajit Again

Indrajit now came forward, and consoled and encouraged Ravana who was sunk in a sea of despair. So long as he was alive, he said, there was no need for Ravana to be so afraid. He would vanquish the two brothers Rama and Lakshmana in no time. Getting ready for the ordeal ahead, he performed a fire sacrifice and saw some indications that he would meet with success. He sallied forth, and becoming invisible by using his magical powers, he attacked every one of the stalwart vanaras and rained showers of arrows on them. Rama, Lakshmana and the vanaras could not detect where the enemy was; and naturally they were unable to hit an invisible target It was not with arrows alone that they were attacked but with

other weapons like spears, tridents and maces. Judging from the force and ferocity of the attack and the unceasing shower of arrows, Rama concluded that it must be Indrajit who was once again indulging in a deceitful fight. Indrajit covered the entire vanara army in his attack and worked havoc in their ranks. While Rama was pointing this out to Lakshmana, Indrajit's astras hit them and they were laid low and the rakshasa hero returned hilariously to Lanka.

When Rama and Lakshmana were seen to fall on the ground, the whole of the vanara army became stupefied and horror-stricken. Even stalwarts like Sugriva, Nila, Angada and Jambavan were unable to move. Vibhishana went round and told the dejected vanaras that there was no reason for depression and that Rama and Lakshmana merely subjected themselves to the Brahmastra of Indrajit out of respect for Lord Brahma. Hanuman and Vibhishana then took torches in their hands and moved from place to place rendering help to the countless number of wounded. They saw the aged Jambavan in a corner, with life flickering. He was not able to see Vibhishana; he could only make him out by his voice and he asked "Is Hanuman alive"? Vibhishana asked Jambavan: "Why are you so solicitous for Hanuman? You are not showing the same interest in Sugriva, Angada, or even Rama". Jambavan replied that it was because he believed that if Hanuman were alive they were all alive, and if Hanuman was dead, they were also dead. Thereupon Hanuman prostrated himself at Jambavan's feet. Jambavan pointed out to him that there was no time to be lost and that he should go and get the vital herbs from the Himalayas, if Rama, Lakshmana and the vanara leaders were to be revived. This was no difficult task for Hanuman. The great vanara hero reached the Himalaya mountain in an instant and unable to single out the required herbs, uprooted the Oshada Parvada hill itself and brought it. The very fragrance of the herbs revived Rama and Lakshmana

and the rest. *Hanuman then swiftly took back the hill to* its place and returned to the battlefield.

Several Rakshasa Heroes Killed

As the next step, Sugriva ordered that Lanka should be set on fire. While the rapidly spreading fire did its work, the arrows of Rama brought down the towers of the citadel The shrieks of the rakshasas and the shouts of the vanaras and the twanging of Rama's bow made the very corners of the earth resound. The furious Ravana now ordered Nikumbha and Kumbha, sons of Kumbhakarana, to go and engage the enemy. They marched forth accompanied by other rakshasa leaders and a merciless battle was fought. On the side of the vanaras, Angada was the chief man in the fight. Even he was unable to withstand Kumbha's atacks. The other vanaras rushed to his help. Sugriva came out and made a terrible onslaught on Kumbha and finally put an end to his life while Hanuman killed Nikumbha, brother of Kumbha.

Ravana *next despatched to the battlefield Makaraksha,* the son of Khara. This warrior strutted out and challenged Rama and Lakshmana in boastful words. With a sarcastic smile, Rama told him that wars were won by deeds and not by words. Makaraksha showed his skill and strength but they were of no avail against Rama's fiery arrows.

Indrajit's Return

On hearing of this, Ravana issued a command to his son Indrajit to go to the battlefield once again and put an end to the powerful brothers. Indrajit who was an adept in the special technique of waging battle, himself remaining invisible, came on again and launched a fierce attack. Lakshmana told his brother that he would resort to the Brahmastra and exterminate all the rakshasas. Rama reminded him of the code of ethics in war which prohibited the killing of those who had not fought, or who did not show themselves, or who surrendered, or who were in

retreat, or who were inebriate. So Lakshmana could do nothing. After some time, Indrajit went back into the city and again issued from its western gate with a counterfeit Sita in his chariot. On seeing him, the vanara army led by Hanuman leapt on him as one man. The pitiable condition of Sita brought tears into Hanuman's eyes Indrajit struck the counterfeit Sita several times. The infuriated Hanuman could not restrain himself, and levelling abuses at Indrajit for his atrocious cruelty towards a helpless lady, he fell on him. Indrajit then said: "I shall now kill her for whose sake Sugriva and Rama are waging this war against us It has been said that women should not be killed but this does not apply to those who are the cause of endless trouble". Saying this, he cut the counterfeit form of Sita in twain and raised a shout of joy. The vanaras were greatly frightened and once again they fled from the field of combat. Hanuman taunted them for their cowardice and asked them to follow his lead. He became fierce like the God of Death at the time of the world's dissolution and with mingled feelings of sorrow and anger waged an unparalleled fight against Indrajit. The rakshasas under Indrajit's leadership also rose to the occasion. On seeing that the vanaras were rapidly losing ground, Hanuman decided on a strategic retreat. He fell back with his forces steadily and without exhibiting any fear or concern. Indrajit was elated and went back to Lanka to offer oblations to the god of fire in front of the temple of Nikumbhila for final success.

Lakshmana's Hymn against Dharma

Meanwhile, Rama directed Jambavan to rush to Hanuman's help Jambavan repaired to the western gate wherefrom Hanuman was retreating. Hanuman brought Jambavan back with him and told Rama of the death of Sita at the hands of Indrajit. The news overwhelmed Rama and he dropped down unconscious like a log of wood. Lakshmana embraced his brother and indulged in a tirade

against the so-called dharma which was unable to save them from such irredeemable misery. What was the use of dharma, exclaimed Lakshmana, if it did not save them at such a juncture? Adharma brought prosperity and dharma brought misery; therefore there was no such thing as dharma. It was thoroughly useless to cling to dharma as a code or rule of conduct to follow. He said: "We cut at the very root of our dharma when we gave up the kingdom, he who is possessed of wealth and prosperity is surrounded by friends and relations; he is credited with learning; his prowess is applauded; he is the wise man; he is possessed of all virtues, the world is for him and not for us. Our original mistake lay in renouncing the kingdom. Rise up, brother. With my arrows I shall now avenge the death of Sita and raze Lanka to the ground".

Vibhishana's Advice

Vibhishana happened to come there just then and saw Rama lying unconscious on the lap of Lakshmana. Lakshmana told him that Rama had heard of Indrajit's killing Sita. Vibhishana assured them that this was all a trick by Ravana to deceive the vanaras and to gain time so that he might finish his sacrifice before the Nikumbhila temple. If he were allowed to complete that ceremony, he would become invincible. It was necessary that the performance of the sacrifice should be prevented. Vibhishana asked Rama, who had by this time recovered from the shock of his grief, to send Lakshmana with him at once so that they could repair to the place where Indrajit was and intercept his sacrifice

Rama was unable to comprehend clearly what Vibhishana said and he wanted it to be repeated. Vibhishana once again pointed out the crisis in which they were, and the need for instantaneous action, as otherwise, if Indrajit finished his sacrifice, there could be no doubt that he would destroy them all completely. They

should see that the efficacy of worship and prayer was not added to Indrajit's skill and genius. He wanted Lakshmana to be deputed on this mission. Rama agreed and asked his brother to take a strong army with him, led by chosen leaders like Hanuman and Jambavan so that they could penetrate the enemy positions and appear before Indrajit before the conclusion of the Nikumbhila sacrifice. Lakshmana assured Rama that he would fulfil the duty entrusted to him, prostrated himself at his feet, and left for the Nikumbhila temple without further delay.

Vibhishana and Indrajit

Lakshmana and his companions saw a vast rakshasa army assembled before them like dark clouds. This horde had to be dispersed and disintegrated before they could reach the spot where the sacrifice was being performed. Lakshmana sped his arrows in relentless succession against the rakshasas who stood steadfast and showed no signs of breaking up. When the battle between the two armies became furious and the vanaras were beginning to forge ahead, Indrajit rose up from the unfinished rite to stem the tide The aggressive Hanuman was the target for attack by the rakshasas, but he never flinched for a moment. As he was steadily gaining the upper hand, Indrajit directed his charioteer to turn the vehicle towards Hanuman. His arrows and missiles were calmly received by Hanuman who told Indrajit: "If you are a valiant hero, come out for a duel. You will never escape alive from my hands" As they were thus exchanging words, Vibhishana spurred on Lakshmana and both of them managed to reach the huge banyan tree under which the sacrifice was being performed. Indrajit saw Vibhishana and taunted him with cowardice and desertion and disloyalty, not only to the family in which he had been born but to the whole race of the rakshasas. "You have become a slave to the enemy and you are beneath contempt. You have sought refuge with the mean and the ignominious,

giving up your own noble family. Whatever their faults, one's own kith and kin should be preferred to strangers, no matter what are the virtues of the latter. He who gives up his own side and seeks the protection of the enemy will ultimately meet with destruction at the enemy's hands". Vibhishana replied: "You are chattering and jibbering a lot of nonsense. Though born as a rakshasa, I pay heed to what is just and righteous. Who can remain with a brother who is so wicked and who covets other people's wives? Such a man should be forsaken as a house on fire. The three primary sins are greediness for others' wealth, coveting other men's wives, and suspecting friends. The killing of sages, ungovernable anger, and obstinacy—these qualities which characterise my brother are the causes of his ruin It is on account of these faults that I had to forsake him There will be no more of Lanka or you or your father, I assure you. You are an impertinent young fellow possessed of too much pride. Why do you blabber like this? Your time is up. Fight with Lakshmana and then you can perform your rites in the abode of Yama"

Lakshmana's Victory over Indrajit

Indrajit thereupon turned to Lakshmana and they stood face to face. Then followed a tremendous battle between them preceded by an exchange of hot words and mutual challenges. Observing good omens on every side, Vibhishana asked Lakshmana to make haste and Indrajit became dazed for a while by Lakshmana's fierce onslaught. Recovering from his stupor and again indulging in boastfulness, Indrajit asked Lakshmana to stand firm against his attack. Lakshmana spoke light-heartedly of his foe and met his one arrow with ten. Each destroyed the other's armour and drew blood. Equal in combat, they never tired and the fight lasted long. The clash of arrows was terrific. The bodies of the two warriors became red with blood. Vibhishana pointed out that, if Indrajit and

his army were vanquished, Ravana's strength would be vitally sapped; and he goaded the vanaras on to attack in full strength. "It is not proper for me to fight with and kill my brother's son; tears would dim my eyes", said Vibhishana. As a result of Vibhishana's exhortation, there was a general battle between the rakshasas and the vanaras. Meanwhile, Indrajit and Lakshmana continued their archery-duel with fierce and unabated vigour. Like the sun and the moon behind summer clouds, they became *visible and invisible alternately*, covered with and escaping from each other's rain of arrows. They were so quick and dexterous and nimble that the processes of taking out an arrow, aiming and releasing it, and its striking the enemy were all merged into a single act. Marvellous were their feats. The sun was obscured; the skies became dark and the wind ceased to blow. "May the worlds be saved," prayed the sages. Lakshmana killed Indrajit's charioteer. Undaunted, Indrajit continued the fight, himself manoeuvring the chariot. The steeds were killed by the vanaras, but *standing on the ground, Indrajit covered Lakshmana* with his arrows.

Asking his forces to continue the battle for a short while, Indrajit left the field unseen, returned to Lanka and took a new chariot and came back ready for the fray, causing Lakshmana and the rest to wonder at his lightning quickness. He pounced on the vanara forces and they *could not stand before him*; so deadly was his attack. They sought refuge behind Lakshmana. Lakshmana advanced and broke his bow, but Indrajit quickly grasped another. Lakshmana shattered even this Indrajit *took hold of yet* another But Lakshmana gave him no respite. He destroyed his new charioteer The contest now became intense and fierce Vibhishana joined in the fray and accounted for Indrajit's horses. Indrajit took up Yama's arrow and Lakshmana took up the one that Kubera had given him. When the bows had been bent and the arrows sped, they flew with the sound of birds, met each other

in the sky, and dropped down spent. Thus several first-rate arrows were exchanged, each countered its opposite midway, and did not penetrate further towards the enemy. Finally, Indrajit used the Asura world-destructive arrow. Lakshmana took up Indra's arrow and let it go against the rakshasa hero with this invocation: "If Rama is a dharmatma (embodiment of righteous conduct); if he is unswerving from Truth and if he has no equal in courage and valour, may you go and kill the son of Ravana" The effect was instantaneous. Indrajit's head with its coronet fell to the ground and he lay dead The rakshasa forces, on seeing this, fled in terror in a hundred directions, some escaped into Lanka, some jumped into the sea and some ran away and hid themselves in the mountains. The whole world was delighted at being rid of this most wicked being. The vanaras praised Lakshmana's skill and greatness and they danced with joy, shouting, "Long live Lakshmana".

Ravana's Grief and Rama's Prowess

Rama took Lakshmana on his lap and embraced him with overflowing joy: Indrajit's death meant Ravana's doom Meanwhile in Lanka, Ravana bemoaned the loss of his valiant son and wept bitterly He who had conquered Indra was slain by an ordinary mortal. Ungovernable fury seized Ravana, and asking for a sword he rushed to the Asoka grove to put an end to Sita, who was the prime cause of all his affliction and misery. On seeing him, Sita trembled as an aspen leaf and cursed her own misjudgment in refusing Hanuman's offer to carry her back to Rama on his shoulders. Ravana was not easily to be dissuaded from his murderous intentions, but in the nick of time, Suparsva, one of his wise and noble-minded ministers, reminded the king of his great lineage and fame and pointed out the gross impropriety of killing a defenceless woman in sheer anger. He asked Ravana to gird up his loins and prepare for the attack on Rama who was his foe. His advice was taken.

Ravana sent his best troops in advance to reduce the numbers of the enemy. They came to the field of battle and delivered one of the fiercest attacks. Finding the vanaras thoroughly scared and demoralised in the fight, Rama took up his bow and darted from it his gandharva arrow with deadly effect. The rakshasa forces swayed to and fro in utter helplessness. They were cut and killed and burnt but they could not see the attacking Rama. At one time, there was only one Rama visible but at the next they saw a thousand Ramas. Such was the illusion created by Rama's arrow. The tip of his bow whirled round and round like a flaming torch. Countless rakshasas were slain by Rama single-handed. To the wondering Sugriva, Vibhishana, Hanuman, Jambavan and the rest, Rama exclaimed with the flush of a warrior's pride, "Such superb archery can only be seen in Tryambaka (Siva) or me". Many of the rakshasis, who lost their husbands or sons or brothers or near relatives in the battle, cried aloud and blamed Ravana for his cupidity, lust and obstinacy, and they were apprehensive of their own survival. They wailed: "No one can stand against Rama; who is there to protect us now?"

Their laments and fears reached the ears of Ravana and kindled afresh his rage against Rama. He summoned to his presence the surviving generals like Mahodara, Mahaparsva and Virupaksha and asked them to get ready to accompany him; he boasted to them that he would not return from the field without slaying Rama and Lakshmana. The orders were instantly obeyed, and innumerable rakshasa battalions of infantry, cavalry, elephants, chariots and steeds stood ready. Ravana looked like Yama himself. He marched at their head in a glorious ornamented chariot drawn by swift horses and issued out by the gate besieged by Rama and Lakshmana. Such bad omens as the bedimming of the sun, the tremor of the earth, the scarlet drizzle of rain, the screeching of birds, the faltering of horses, the falling of meteors, the wailing of jackals, the quivering

of his left eyelid and shoulder—were all disregarded by Ravana who fell on the vanara forces with unparalleled fury, playing havoc with them and creating dismay and consternation. The fight was by no means one-sided however. Virupaksha and Mahodara fell by Sugriva's hand; and Angada slew Mahaparsva.

Sakti against Lakshmana

Ravana, consumed by anger, launched an impetuous attack and the vanaras were overwhelmed by his strength. Lakshmana, eager to precede his brother, attacked Ravana. But Ravana, unimpeded by the obstruction offered, came up to Rama. The two heroes rained arrows at each other, and displayed marvellous skill in attack and defence. The sky was overcast with their weapons and the sun peeped in as through a window. Far-famed experts in archery, Rama and Ravana could not easily overpower one another. The Asura-astra of Ravana was met by the Agneya-astra of Rama. His Rudra-astra was opposed by the Gandharva-astra. Lakshmana brought down Ravana's flag and the head of his charioteer. Vibhishana used his mace against the horses with fatal effect. Angered by this interference, Ravana hurled at his brother the weapon called Mahasakti, but Lakshmana neutralised its force. Again, Ravana took up a Sakti weapon of greater potency and aimed it against Vibhishana. Realising that Vibhishana's life was in peril, the redoubtable Lakshmana hurled a host of arrows at the enemy and impaired his aim. Vibhishana thus escaping, Ravana directed the weapon against Lakshmana himself. It came against Lakshmana roaring with the sound of eight bells, fell on him and pierced his heart. Lakshmana dropped to the ground. Grieved at what had befallen his brother, Rama pounced on Ravana and battered him. The Sakti could not be pulled out of Lakshmana's heart. Ravana seized the opportunity and covered Rama and the vanaras with a ceaseless shower of arrows. Rama asked Sugriva and Hanu-

man to surround and protect the prostrate Lakshmana and exclaimed: "The time has come for the exhibition of my full powers; the monstrous enemy is standing before my eyes; I should give such battle as will rid this world of him or me; you will now witness my feats of valour which will be remembered for all time to come." Ravana was unable to stand before Rama's fury and fled ignominiously from the field.

Lakshmana did not revive. Rama lamented long. He said that his brother, who was his other self, was even dearer to him than his wife Sita and that while he was at death's door, he had no interest in life. There was no longer any point in the battle; he had no concern with Sita or the kingdom. "Wives can be secured anywhere as also relations. But where shall I get a brother born out of the same womb?" he cried Sushena, the vanara doctor, examined Lakshmana carefully and pronounced him still alive. He asked Hanuman to go and bring from the mountains, the herbs Vishalya Karani, Savarna Karani, Sanjava Karani and Sandhana Karani. Hanuman hurried forth and unable to detect the herbs, brought back the crest of the mountain where they grew. The herbs were applied to the dying Lakshmana and he recovered consciousness, and slowly gained strength. The physical feat of Hanuman and the medical skill of Sushena were praised by all. Rama embraced Lakshmana, saying, "You have been rescued from the jaws of death, my brother. I want no more of fighting or of victory; what does Sita or even life matter to me?" Lakshmana replied in low and feeble tones: "Having vowed vengeance, you should not speak thus like a weak man; great and strong men should not break their vows; do not entertain any spirit of defeatism on my account. The enemy cannot escape with his life, if he once comes within reach of your arrows. I should like to hear of his destruction before today's sunset."

Rama and Ravana's Combat

Ravana came back in a fresh chariot to renew the fight With Rama standing on the ground it was not an equal encounter. So Indra sent his chariot with Matali, his charioteer, for Rama's use. He also sent his own bow and armour. Then there ensued a fight between the two foe-men which made the spectators' hairs stand on end. Arrow was met with arrow; thrust with thrust and blow with blow. The flag on Rama's chariot was blown off; Matali was attacked and his horses seriously injured; and for a moment it looked as though Rama was losing ground; he was unable to withstand Ravana's onslaughts. But he recovered soon enough and the rage which played on his face made every one, including Ravana, tremble. It looked as though the fight would result in world-destruction. Ravana hurled at Rama the famous Sula and it came forward emitting fire. Rama directed the Sakti weapon against it. Both met midway and destroyed each other. Though Rama was struck by arrow after arrow, he never flinched. He called Ravana a mean thief who had taken away by stealth another man's wife and told him that it was time he suffered proper punishment for his wicked deeds. Ravana seemed to lose courage; he was unable to point his arrows and even when he sped them, they fell powerless. This was because his end was fast approaching. His charioteer saw this and steered the chariot away from the field. Ravana became angry and accused the driver of conniving with the enemy. The driver explained his reasons for making the manoeuvre and dispelled his master's suspicions of treachery or disloyalty. Ravana became pleased and ordered him to take the chariot again to the battlefield. On seeing Ravana standing before him once more, Rama became tired at the thought that this duel seemed to be a never-ending one Sage Agastya was one of those who had come to witness the encounter. He advised Rama to worship Aditya (the Sun-god) for success. Aditya was the creator, preserver and destroyer of

all life; those who worshipped him need have no fear and there could be no danger for them, nor anything too difficult to achieve. Rama took the advice, and even on the field of battle he offered fervent prayers to Aditya, who, from the lofty sky, made signs to Rama to hurry up, as Ravana's moment of death was fast nearing. The omens also were at this time uniformly auspicious for Rama's success and Ravana's defeat.

The final fight took place. Those who saw it were amazed at the dexterity displayed by the combatants who employed all their wonderful skill to achieve victory. The excitement of the fight became overpoweringly intense. The arrows formed a cloud screen as it were against the very skies Neither of the heroes languished; each was so bent upon the other's destruction All the permutations and combinations known in the science of archery were displayed and employed. It was difficult to say which of the two was greater. Such an encounter had never been witnessed before Rama gradually assumed the offensive but as he brought down each head of the ten-headed monster, another head sprang up in its place. Rama saw no end to this process which lasted through days and nights.

Matali, Indra's charioteer, suggested to Rama that the Brahma-astra might be invoked and employed Rama took the hint and, after going through the necessary repetition of mantras, discharged the famous weapon at Ravana's heart with unerring aim. It fell right on Ravana's chest and sundered his heart and took his life The great monster fell from the chariot and lay dead on the ground. The rakshasas fled in chaotic disorder and disappeared The vanaras sent up thunderous peals of joy. A cool breeze wafted over the battlefield; the sky became clear, the sun shone brightly; the gods in ecstatic joy sent down showers of fragrant flowers. The praises for Rama rent the air.

Vibhishana bemoaned his brother's death, remember-

ing his several virtues and prowess in battle even with the gods. Rama was also sorrow-stricken. Vibhishana's brother was a brother unto himself. Vibhishana reflected for a while and began to dwell on Ravana's misdeeds. Rama reminded Vibhishana that all enmities should end with life and asked him to perform the funeral rites due to the fallen hero. The ladies of Ravana's harem became immersed in grief at the fate which had befallen him. He was dear and beloved to each one of them; they showered their last affections on the lifeless body of their lord and protector and wailed that neither wealth, nor valour could reverse the decrees of destiny. The chief queen Mandodari was drowned in a well of sorrow; she could hardly believe that he who was the terror of Indra had been struck down by a mere mortal. But was Rama a mere mortal? No, he was the lord Narayana himself who had assumed man's form for the chastisement of evil and wickedness. Was not Sita more holy and sacred than Arundhati or Rohini? And was it meet to covet her and coerce her? Good and evil bring their own rewards; the tears of the chaste do not fall in vain. Turning to Ravana's corpse, she exclaimed in grief, "You hug the earth lovingly, but do not even look at me, your darling queen", and she swooned on Ravana's breast. The other ladies revived and consoled her. Rama again asked Vibhishana to perform the funeral ceremonies saying that even one so addicted to evil deserved compassion, especially when he was no longer alive. Vibhishana accepted the advice and went through the rites according to the shastras.

Those who had come to see the battle slowly dispersed Matali, Indra's charioteer, took leave of Rama and returned to Indra's court. Rama gave orders for the coronation of Vibhishana. Sacred waters were brought from the ocean and sprinkled over Vibhishana's head from a golden vessel. In the midst of a large concourse of people, the righteous Vibhishana was crowned in Lanka as its king by the mandate of Rama. There were festive

rejoicings on a large scale. Vibhishana came back to Rama and stood by his side in all humility. Rama then asked Hanuman to seek Vibishana's permission, go to Lanka, and inform Sita of their welfare and Ravana's end. He was to come back with any message she might send.

The Meeting between Sita and Rama

Hanuman approached Sita with due respect and humility and coveyed to her the glad tidings. She was speechless with joy. Surprised at her silence, he asked her why she remained mute. With her throat choking with delight, Sita said that she was unable to think of anything in the whole world that could be an adequate reward to him for being the messenger of such good news; none could equal him in intelligence, discrimination, strength, valour, courage, humility and endurance. Hanuman thereupon asked her permission to make mince-meat of the rakshasis who had tormented and tortured her. With singular noble-heartedness and charity, Sita declined to accept the proposal "What could mere servants do in the face of their master's orders?" she said. "Evil fortune subjected me to these troubles, why blame or chastise the poor women who did Ravana's bidding; now that he is dead, they will no longer ill-treat me". And for her message, she told Hanuman that she was eager to see her husband. Hanuman then hurried back to Rama

When he told Rama that Sita was anxious to see him, Rama closed his eyes in thought and shed tears. Heaving a hot sigh, he asked Vibhishana to bring Sita to him, after a bath and bedecked with ornaments. When Sita was informed of this, she expressed a desire to see Rama in her present condition but Vibhishana pointed out that it was proper that she should comply with her lord's wishes. She agreed and was duly taken before Rama in a palanquin. Joy, anger and self-pity took hold of Rama when he was roused from his thoughtful mood and informed of the

approach of Sita. When the surrounding crowd was being dispersed to make way for her, Rama gave strict orders that the move should be stopped saying, "These are my men; good conduct is the main protection for women; in sorrow, amidst difficulties in war, at the time of marriage and during sacrifices, even royal ladies can be seen. She has been in the midst of a cruel war, and what wrong is there, if she is seen by others especially in my presence? Bring her here soon and let her see me surrounded by my friends" The utterance of these words by Rama made Lakshmana, Sugriva and Hanuman rather uneasy. They suspected that Rama was not in a pleasant mood. Meanwhile Sita, with her head bent down in all modesty and humility, and shrinking within herself, came very near to Rama and wept exclaiming nothing more than "*Aryaputra!*"

Sita's Fire Ordeal

Seeing her standing at his side, Rama addressed her thus: "By conquering the enemy, I have got you back. My valour has been established and my vow fulfilled". And then all of a sudden, Rama assumed a face of stern severity and uttered these heart-rending words: "This fight was not waged for your sake. I have protected my own honour Your presence here gives me no pleasure, you are subject to suspicion. I will have nothing to do with you You may go wherever you like What man of noble lineage will take back a woman who has dwelt in another's home? The evil-minded Ravana carried you on his lap How can I now take you back? Turn your mind, if you wish, to Lakshmana, or Bharata or Sugriva or Vibhishana; you are welcome to take your own course. Ravana is not likely to have left such beauty as yours unsullied".

Sita could not brook her husband's cruel words. She looked at him with tear-laden eyes and sobbingly exclaimed: "You have spoken unseemly words that pierce the

ears and the heart. Only the ignorant and vulgar speak thus. I am not such as you think. It is not from my choice that another touched me. The heart within me has been dedicated to you, I swear. Your passion has overpowered your judgment, my lord. You have chosen not to remember the place of my birth or my upbringing by Janaka or my entire career of unswerving devotion to you". Weeping, she then turned to Lakshmana and asked him to light a big fire so that she might immolate herself in it. With an angry face, Lakshmana looked at Rama but finding no trace of remorse or relaxation of severity, he set alight a huge fire. Sita went round Rama with her face bent down and prostrating herself before all the gods and the holy men, she entered into the blazing fire, exclaiming: "If my heart has been steadfast to Rama, and if in thought, word and deed, I have never swerved from him, may this fire protect me". There was astonishment and consternation all around at this great act of self-sacrifice. All the gods gathered together, and Brahma, their leader, reminded Rama that he was Narayana himself who had come down to the earth to destroy Ravana and that it was not meet that he should be indifferent to Sita who was no other than Lakshmi, and who was now entering the fire. And they sang a hymn of prayer to Rama.

Agni, the god of fire, now sprang up from the blaze with Sita on his lap and proclaimed that she was chaste and pure and knew no sin and that Rama should receive her back without any hesitation. Then Rama confessed what was really in his heart He exclaimed: "I know her spotless purity, but I did not want to take her back without this test, lest people should say that my love blinded my sense of propriety". So saying Rama welcomed his wife back into his arms.

The assembled gods then showed to Rama the spirit of his father Dasaratha The old king seated his son on his lap, caressed him and showered blessings on him. Rama requested him to relent in his judgment against

Kaikeyi and Bharata, whom he had intended to discard and forsake for ever. Dasaratha agreed and then addressed Lakshmana and told him how pleased he was with his single-minded devotion to Rama and his remarkable self-abnegation. Turning to Sita he begged her to forgive her husband for his apparent cruelty and pointed out that the ordeal was designed in order to avoid public criticism. He finally took leave of them all and returned to his heavenly abode.

Indra then asked Rama if he wanted any boon. Rama asked that all those who had fought for him and lay dead on the field of battle should regain their life. "So be it," said Indra and the dead vanaras rose up as if from sleep. The gods thereupon left, suggesting to Rama that he should go back to Ayodhya quickly and meet his mothers and Bharata and Satrughna and crown himself king.

Rama Return

Rama decided to return at once. The aerial car Pushpaka was brought. All of their friends including Vibhishana left Lanka with Rama, Sita and Lakshmana. As the car sped along the sky, Rama pointed out to Sita the chief places of interest that lay along the course of their journey, such as the bridge built by Nala, the temple of Mahadeva, the city of Kishkindha (Sugriva's capital), the river Godavari, the several ashramas of the sages, the river Yamuna and the hermitage of Bharadwaja. They got down at this hermitage and the sage Bharadwaja entertained Rama and his party and blessed them all.

Rama sent Hanuman in advance to inform his friend Guha and his brother Bharata of his safe return. He also wanted to know how Bharata received the news. On seeing Hanuman and hearing the glad news, Bharata, who was pining for Rama's return and who had been living the life of a recluse since his brother's sojourn in the forest, was transported with joy and dropped down on the ground in ecstasy. He embraced Hanuman for being the mes-

senger of such goods news. He then asked Satrughna to make Ayodhya ready for Rama's arrival the next day. The roads were to be watered and flowers strewn; flags, buntings and festoons were to be displayed all over. The city was to wear the most festive appearance. Satrughna carried out the orders promptly and the public rejoicings in Ayodhya were at their highest when people heard that Rama was approaching the outskirts of the capital. Bharata and Satrughna, the queen mothers, and the ministers and troops marched out of the town to receive the hero.

Bharata's Joy

Bharata carried Rama's sandals on his head and held over them the royal white umbrella. The meeting took place near Nandigrama. The entire populace dismounted and stood like statues, on seeing their great king. Bharata gazed at Rama with hands folded in due reverence and prostrated himself. Rama descended from the car, lifted Bharata, seated him on his lap and embraced and caressed him. Bharata paid equal respect to Lakshmana; and the leading vanaras were then introduced to him. On meeting Sugriva, Bharata termed him their fifth brother. He praised Vibhishana for the help he had rendered in the great task. Rama fell at the feet of his three mothers and asked their blessings. After reaching Nandigrama, the ascetic residenec of Bharata, Rama sent back Pushpaka, the celestial car to Lanka.

Rama's Coronation

There was tumultuous joy Sita was taken care of by the queens and Rama by his brothers. They were duly bathed and bedecked in costly garments and jewels. Sumantra brought the chariot and Rama got in with his beloved Sita. Bharata seized the reins, Satrughna held the umbrella over their heads, Lakshmana and Vibhishana waved white chowries before them. Sugriva marched by Rama's side, mounted on Rama's favourite elephant,

Satrunjaya. The whole host of vanaras accompanied them in appropriate vehicles. Ayodhya was soon reached. The city was gay and the people went delirious with joy, raising shouts of praise to Rama. Bharata accommodated all the guests in suitable residences; and Sugriva was allotted Rama's own palace. Waters were brought in vessels of gold from the seas and several sacred rivers. Sage Vasishta made Rama sit on a throne set with precious stones and, assisted by many rishis of equal eminence, poured the holy waters on him. The hoary bejewelled crown, which had been in the family since the days of Manu, was placed on Rama's head. To the accompaniment of *mantras*, music and dance, both celestial and earthly, Rama was anointed king amidst thunderous acclamation. Ayodhya went mad with joy. Costly and appropriate gifts were given to Vibhishana and the leading vanaras. A pearl necklace, which Rama gave to Sita, was in turn given by her, with his approval, to Hanuman, for whom she showed special affection and regard. Rama bade farewell to the guests and they took leave of him regretfully. Ayodhya was pervaded with immeasurable happiness and joy. Rama asked Lakshmana to prepare himself to become the Crown Prince, but he declined the offer and Bharata had to take his place.

Rama ruled over the kingdom long, efficiently, wisely and righteously. The welfare and prosperity of the people were his sole concern and he never deviated by a hair's breadth even from his royal duties. He became the idol of the people and was really worshipped by them. There were no untoward calamities in his kingdom. There was no crime and no lawlessness. People were all healthy and lived to a good old age; there were no permature deaths. The path of right conduct was not forsaken by any one. Perfect happiness and contentment prevailed everywhere. Rama's name was on everybody's lips; it seemed as though the world had become identified with Rama; so just and benevolent was his rule.

Those who read Rama's story with reverence and devotion will be prosperous in this life and attain permanent bliss in the next.

GLOSSARY

ADHARMA—Unrighteousness, injustice.
AGNI—Fire-god
ANJANEYA—Hanuman.
APSARASES—Celestial damsels, wives of Gandharvas.
ARTHA—Prosperity; one of the four ends of human existence.
ARYAPUTRA—My lord!
ASHRAMA—Hermitage.
ASTRA—missile, often guided by spells.
ASURA—Evil spirit, opp. to Deva.
BHUTAGANAS—Class of spirits, devils.
CHAKRA—The Disc or circular missile of Vishnu.
CHAMARA—Bushy tail of a deer, used for fanning; insignia of royalty.
CHOWRIE—(Same as Chamara).
DANAVA—Demon.
DEVA—Celestial.
DHARMA—Righteousness; justice.
GADHA—The mace weapon of Vishnu.
GANDHARVA—Celestial musician; a demi-god.
GARUDA—The avian vehicle of Vishnu, foe of serpents.
HEMANTHA—Cold or winter season.
HOMA—Consecrated fire.
INDRA—King of celestials.
KAMA—Love or desire; one of the ends of human existence.
KINNARA—A mythical being with a human head and form of a horse.
KUBERA—God of riches.

KAMANDALU—Water-pot used by ascetics.
MADHAVA—Month called Vaisakha.
MANMATHA—God of Love.
MANTRA—Spell, incantation.
NAGA—Semi-divine being with human head and serpent tail.
NISHADA—Hunter, an aboriginal.
RAKSHASA—Demon.
RAKSHASI—Demoness.
RISHI—Sage.
RUDRA—Lord Siva in his irate aspect.
SADHU—*Virtuous person, saint*
SAKTI—Power-potential.
SANDHYA—Morning, noon and evening prayers.
SANKARA—Lord Siva.
SANKHA—Conch, emblem of Vishnu.
SANYASI—Ascetic.
SHASTRAS—Religious treatise, scripture.
SULA—Trident.
TAPAS—Penance.
VAIDEHI—Sita.
VANAPRASTHA—The third stage of religious life, the othe being *Brahmacharya, Grahastha* and *Sanyasa.*
VANARA—Monkey, ape.
VEDAS—Hindu scriptures.
VEENA—The Indian lute.
VIMANA—Aerial chariot.
YAKSHA—A class of demi-gods attending on Kubera.
YAMA—God of Death.
YUVARAJA—Crown-prince.

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